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net

Sít'

of

Víry

faith

Part II

c. 1440

**FIRST ENGLISH TRANSLATION
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PART TWO

Beginning: on social classes, each individually

CHAPTER ONE

Faith was once pure, but corruption and pride have distorted it

The foundation of all these things lies in Peter's net, and this will be discussed throughout. With his net of faith, Peter pulled many believers out of the sea of the world—out of error and disbelief—and gathered them in God's faith like fish caught in a net. He prepared them to be saved, so that all believers would be united in heart and soul. But over time, as Satan worked his influence, people who opposed the faith forced their way in, like fish that don't belong in the net, and they tore it apart. As a result, faith no longer holds the same power and righteousness it once did—what remains are only empty symbols of faith in those who have strayed. These opposing groups refuse to follow faith or live by it. Instead, they twist it for their own purposes, using it as a shield to cover their corruption—like how a cloak can conceal a leper's disease. They don't actually want to live by faith; in fact, they despise it when faith calls them to a righteous life. In this way, faith gets lost among them. Each of these groups, when they take shelter under the name of faith while actually contradicting it, wants their contradiction to be seen as part of faith itself. They insist that their own distortions are not only acceptable but actually taught by faith, as if faith should simply accept whatever form they give it. The problem is that faith has poor leaders. They fail to recognize when something has been wrongly mixed into faith through error. Instead of examining whether something truly belongs to faith or carries its true spirit, they simply cover everything with the appearance of faith, giving it a false legitimacy. But they are blind guides leading the blind, and their works are twisted and built in darkness.

Therefore, all knowledge and power of faith have perished, because it has been mixed with the wicked, losing the fragrance of its goodness through them. For it honours and adorns all its opponents, so that it may seem as though they belong to faith. Thus, our faith is no longer glorious; it cannot be praised for its righteousness or its spiritual power, because vile wickedness clings to it everywhere, bringing shame to the faith and weakening its true power. They falsely cloak themselves in the beauty of faith, applying all their corruptions to it, decorating their vices with the adornment of faith. But from this adornment of their vices, which they lead against Christ, ugly dragons with large teeth emerge, crushing the bones of every truth. Therefore, our faith appears to be the mother of dragons, having given birth to all the generations that are opposed to it.

And here about the estates and lineages of the crowned. Their birth is in filth, their glory is in death and stench, and the end of their majesty is in disgrace. We will speak briefly about them here. Although they are most evident in their opposition to the cross of Christ and in their blasphemy against Him, yet their opposition cannot be fully apparent, for the false prophet, who speaks lies in the name of God, has approached them, justifying their blasphemy by saying: "Such a way of life befits your estate!" And because they are exalted in the world, every manner of opposition to Christ is deemed fitting for them, and their conscience has been taken from them by the lying mouth of the false prophet, who stands at their tables of indulgence. Though they surpass Lucifer in pride, though they are full of violence and extortion, though they lead a life of Sodom and have freedom in every kind of evil, all of this is deemed fitting for them, and they feel no pangs of conscience. But all of this—whatever could harm God or Christ—would not be particularly strange if they were pagans or Jews or any people entirely opposed to the faith of Christ; if they were not Christians, they could not be so hostile to the crucified Christ while living such a sodomitic life. But the fact that they are Christians, counted among the faithful, and claim the highest authority over the faith—desiring to be lords over it so that the apostolic ministry holds no power unless a priest receives a church from them as patrons, whether through money or rendered services—such usurpation and supposed right over the faith they have obtained, with such opposition to Christ, that I do not know whether even the devils have such enmity toward the dishonoured, mocked, and suffering Christ, that they should cling to such blasphemy and take shelter beneath His sufferings.

No one can truly belong to Christ unless they share in His sufferings, carry them within themselves, and consider His humiliation as their honour—boasting only in His cross and finding glory in His mocked and rejected life. So how misguided is this twisted blasphemy that feels ashamed of Christ's suffering and despises it! But Christ will not take into account that these people have falsely claimed such honour

in the world, adorned it with coats of arms, and mistaken their pride for dignity. Their lineage is born of the devil and the filth of sin—yet they would crown such an accursed line with coats of arms, seeking glory above all others in the world and always insisting on being called and recognized as "good" ¹ because of their status. But no king, prince, lord, or noble should take part in such hostility toward Christ's humiliation if they truly want to be Christian. If they love pride and pleasures that are contrary to Christ's suffering, then why do they involve themselves in the faith? By doing so, they claim to share in Christ's suffering while, at the same time, persist in actions that continually crucify Him within themselves—taking upon themselves the heavy burden of sins that bring Him shame. In truth, their condemnation would be lighter if they were pagans who had never known Christ at all than it will be now. For they have wrongly inserted themselves into His faith, have been baptized in His name, have received His body and blood, and have benefited from His blessings—only to disgrace it all with their sinful rebellion, crucifying the Son of God within themselves. To truly live as a Christian, one must follow what Saint Paul teaches: that those whom God has foreknown, ² He has also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, ³ so that just as we have borne the image of the earthly man, Adam, we may also bear the image of the heavenly man, Jesus Christ. ⁴

These things, though they may seem unreasonable and unnecessary, are so closely tied to a person—as long as that person is a Christian—that faith cannot be followed without them. For in these words lies the entire power of faith. If one accepts faith and desires to be saved through it, they must immediately understand that salvation in Christ is granted to those who will become like Him—taking upon themselves, so to speak, the same image or likeness of His life. This means living in humility, patience, meekness, and rejection of the world—its praise, pleasures, and vanities. In other words, turning away from all greed and desires that drive the world toward sin and the lusts of the flesh, which lead people toward unrighteousness. Only by abandoning these things can one take on the likeness of Christ's renewed life, His humble spirit, and the righteousness He lived by and commanded others to follow. A Christian must have these qualities if they want Christ's faith to lead them to salvation. Without them, a Christian is like a painted image of St. Peter on a wall—without life or understanding.

Thus, these various noble lineages, crowned with coats of arms, stand in direct opposition to everything that has been said. They do so not merely like other people but far exceed them in their disgrace toward the Son of God. For they have a twofold birth:

1 i.e. birth.

2 i.e. predestined for salvation.

3 Romans 8:29.

4 1 Corinthians 15:49.

First, they are born into sin through Adam, inheriting all forms of unrighteousness. Like others, they fall into the same path of damnation, born into death through Adam's sin. Second, they have a supposed noble birth, through which they claim to be lords of good lineage. From this imagined nobility, they derive titles such as "good people," "honourable," "most noble," "dignified," and "wise." This artificially exalted nobility separates them from all others in the world, elevating them above humanity like a banner raised high. They distinguish themselves in every possible way — by name, appearance, clothing, food, posture, and movement. Their customs, manners, and behaviors differ from those of common people, and they measure their entire way of life by worldly honour, which, in truth, reeks of arrogance like a rotting corpse. Their lifestyle, customs, and speech all bear witness to their pride. Because they are considered so "good" due to their noble birth, all manner of wickedness has attached itself to this supposed goodness. For if they are inherently good, then none of the hardships that humanity must endure — being cursed and fallen under God's punishment — should befall them. Instead, their noble status entitles them to the best of bodily and worldly pleasures, ensuring they are always honoured and praised. If they could even seize divine praise for themselves, they would strive to do so. They claim for themselves everything that rightfully belongs to God, and they reach for every form of human glory and prestige. Whatever can be found to indulge bodily pleasures, they consider fitting for their nobility. Conversely, they despise and avoid anything unpleasant. Hard labour, suffering, humiliation, modesty, humility, or serving others — none of these befit their noble status. Their lives must be free, idle, easy, and filled with luxury. They adorn themselves with refined cleanliness, extravagant and unusual clothing, and new fashions designed to amaze, appearing like gods and goddesses in invented splendor and ornamentation. Furthermore, their supposed goodness demands lavishly decorated banquet tables like those of the rich.⁵ They rest on clean, soft beds, speak with sweet and flattering words, and fill their conversations with sycophantic phrases such as, "Would Your Grace be pleased to consider..." Their beauty is maintained with frequent baths, indulging in luxurious and constant washing, burdening their servants as they cleanse themselves to excess. And through such indulgence, they fulfill the ways of a Sodomite life.

This supposed nobility also aligns with pagan rule, for these lineages, crowned with coats of arms, have seized control of the land and gained dominion over all other people. Thus, through the suffering of "plebs"⁶ and "dolts"⁷, they can display their noble goodness —

⁵ From Luke 16: 19 onwards.

⁶ [chlapů] i.e., peasants.

⁷ [výrů] i.e., boors (an insult to peasants).

inflating themselves with immense pride at the expense of their subjects' humiliation and pain, indulging in their pleasures at the cost of their blood and toil. This is the foundation of their so-called virtue. But the moment the labour of the peasants ceases, their noble status would wretchedly fall to the level of mere shepherds.

CHAPTER TWO

Nobility is based on wealth and symbols, not true virtue

The nobility of the gentry is entirely based on a false idea, invented by pagans to obtain their coats of arms from emperors and kings. For performing some heroic service, they are given these coats of arms as gifts, and some even buy them to gain honour: a gate, a wolf's or dog's head, a ladder, half a horse, a trumpet, knives, a pig's intestine, or something similar. The virtue or dignity of noble gentry is found in these coats of arms. Their nobility has the same glory as these symbols from which they derive their supposed greatness. But if they ran out of money to maintain this nobility, hunger would drive them to abandon their coats of arms and take up the plow. Thus, it is money that upholds the honour of their coats of arms and gives them their noble status. Their nobility flourishes more through wealth than through famous coats of arms, and where there is no money, they sit on the same level as peasants—too ashamed to work and often without bread for their meals.

There are many different ranks within the gentry, each defined by its coat of arms, tracing their lineage through them. Without these coats of arms, no one would dare call themselves a noble, for these symbols alone testify to their distinguished birth over the rest of Adam's descendants. When they can prove, with witnesses, that they were "well" born—possessing a ladder or half a horse—the king grants them documents confirming that they were born better than Abel, the second son of Adam,¹ and gives them a title so that they are always called "good" and regarded as such. Even if they live the worst kind of life, their coat of arms will not allow them to be seen as bad. But to be truly "well-born," they must prove it with certainty: that on their mother's side, their grandmother and grandfather were nobles, and likewise on their father's side. Only then can they claim without dispute that they were born from a dog's head. However, if their "good" nobility cannot be confirmed this way, it immediately reeks of peasantry, and they cannot boast so highly of their lineage. Shame forces them down to the ground because the "four corners"² do not testify to their "virtue." But if they were to ask their neighbors about their "virtue," they would hear a very different testimony—about their dishonourable

1 Genesis 4:2.

2 i.e. four births, namely, the noble lineage of both grandfathers and grandmothers. This refers to a concept where noble lineage is traced through both paternal and maternal sides of the family, encompassing the heritage of both grandfathers and grandmothers.

and violent way of life. If they felt shame for their shameful deeds, they would not dare to lift their eyes.

Thus, the glory of the gentry's "virtue" lies in their coats of arms. And just as these coats of arms are great in fame, they bestow the same fame upon those who are born from them. Therefore, great is the glory of a painted half-horse, and those who descend from it have no more glory than the painted half-horse itself.

CHAPTER THREE

Nobility's pride fosters sin, disguising vice as virtue through worldly honour

As I have said, these generations are born into sin twice. The first birth comes from Adam through sin. This first birth naturally leaves sin in the body, inclining every person toward many sins—those that bring pleasure to the flesh and honour in the world. But the second birth into sin among the gentry is based on the false notion that their nobility and lineage, as defined by their coats of arms, originate from the pagans. Everything that upholds or affirms this so-called nobility gives rise to new and countless sins, ensuring that their lineage remains steeped in them. And since the foundation of this nobility, built on coats of arms, is pride masked as honour, it continually grows, falsely claiming for itself what belongs to God—seeking to preserve its own glory and refusing to bear any blame, which rightfully belongs to sinners. This nobility behaves accordingly, boasting of its lineage, honour, and other things that allow it to be praised. At the same time, it fiercely resists anything that might bring it dishonour. It constantly defends itself against disgrace with arrogance, unwillingness to suffer, and refusal to accept shame. If someone were to call such a noble "wretched" or "peasant," he would immediately seek legal action to clear his name of any association with peasantry and to avoid remaining "wretched."

These sins are born from the "virtue" of the gentry, which is based on coats of arms. And since this so-called virtue demands idleness, pleasure, pagan rule, cruelty, and lawless violence—these being tied to its lineage and "nobility"—it breeds countless, unrepentant sins, committed without conscience. For this reason, the gentry is a second mother of sins, multiplying them, as their foundation is built upon deep-rooted error. And since these errors are associated with worldly honour, praise, pleasure, delight, and bodily indulgence, they inevitably give rise to many sins.

And when a priest, going about his duties, brushes aside these sins, saying, "That does no harm, it is fitting," or "This is your rightful order," he waters these sins so they may grow abundantly. Over time, they become accepted as virtues, so that they are committed with honour. And let no one think that I consider only these things to be sins; rather, through faith, I can show that each of these is sinful. If few are willing to accept this as truth, it is no surprise. For in all people, even the learned, sin is a rare thing—almost nothing is considered sinful in these times. Therefore, they will not acknowledge it here, especially the learned, who claim that such sins "do no harm" and are "proper." Since people neither believe in God's commandments nor understand them, they also cannot understand the faith of Christ. Much less do they recognize what sin truly is, nor will they believe that everything which is not born of faith in Christ is sin.¹ Even more so, sin is anything that openly resists Christ by breaking his law, dishonouring the example of his holy life, mocking his suffering, and scorning him with their proud way of life and blasphemous conduct—disgracing his cross.

1 Romans 14:23.

CHAPTER FOUR

Heraldic nobility is corrupt, prideful, sinful, and opposes true faith

And just as that first birth is in Adam's sin, which flows like an open wound unstaunched by blood, so too does this birth of sins continue to flow. And when among the nobles, that first birth is accompanied by this second birth of sins through the lineage of heraldry, then the first, through the second, flows like an open wound with sins. For the first birth indulges itself in the second birth of sins; the sins that exist in the body through the first birth grow through the noble, heraldic lineage. Since that heraldic lineage follows the desires of the flesh with pleasures and praise, it is in this that the sin of the flesh thrives, and sin gains strength through the noble lineage—just as fire burns more intensely when more wood is added. For this nobility serves the desires of sin like the life of the people of Sodom, who paved the way for sin within themselves.

But perhaps the greatest sin of these noble lineages remains in their children, whom they raise and educate in the same sins and errors in which they themselves live, intending to leave them in honour and pleasure according to the ways of this world. And so, such an intention is deeply offensive to God, for in this way they take from God the human creation they bring forth, ensuring that He has no place in it. They place their children into the spirit of the devil, as if dedicating and sacrificing them to idols,

so that through their noble way of life, which is so contrary to God, they worship idols, preventing God from having any claim on them or His Spirit from dwelling within them—just like the unbelieving Jews. For their children, born into the sins of their fathers and mothers, are once again nurtured in many sins through their noble lineage; they are raised and taught in sin so that, by their lineage, they may learn pride, indulgence, and idleness, and, having grown accustomed to them, grow old in them. According to their nobility, it is deemed proper to send them to courts in Germany, where they may learn the most refined forms of pride and other abominations, courtly manners, respectful postures with bows, and be intoxicated with that poison served at courts. And all of this is driven by their pride, which makes them love worldly exaltation above all else; and since they cannot easily achieve this at home, they seek to attach themselves to powerful people, through whom they might attain some honour, so that the elders may boast that their son is a chamberlain to the king, and their daughter arranges or carries the queen's train. Thus, these people are, at their core, nothing but vain glory, puffed up like distasteful spittle, cast aside by the mind of God, entirely reeking with stench, priding themselves on that which is an abomination before the face of God!

And so many heraldic lineages have multiplied in every corner that their inheritances have become too small and narrow for them. They would all like to rule in wealth if they could, yet there is not enough to go around; poverty and hardship press upon many of them, but they refuse to work, considering labour shameful—yet they have large appetites. Therefore, they go to castles like thieves, to rob and plunder the poor, so they may indulge in pleasures and idleness while possessing much property. They live a life of extreme wickedness, surpassing even the pride of the devil, and in their indulgence, they rot like the people of Sodom. And if they are poor, their poverty is cursed in their words and actions, and they are ever ready to turn to crime and various injustices. If they serve, it is often under wicked men, or they steal, or they fall into endless debt, seeking to extract whatever they can from others with flattery and many promises. And thus, they survive half by deceit and half by begging, yet they refuse to work at all, lest they stain their nobility with labour. They have claimed vast and fertile lands by force, and now they lie fallow, with wolves running through them,¹ while they, following courtly ways, stand about, sit around, waste time in idle chatter and gossip. And in these evil ways, their second birth—born of heraldry—sustains them.

But nowhere in the scriptures of God do they have any proof, nor can they prove, that they are of a better lineage than other people. The great King Solomon himself confesses this about himself and others,

¹ Chelčický is not exaggerating here.

saying: "I too am a mortal man, like all others of earthly descent. I was born and breathed the common air, and, like all others, I fell upon the earth and uttered my first cry in wailing. I was nurtured in swaddling clothes with great care. For no king has had a different birth." ² Here, the great and glorious king bears witness that he had no birth other than what is common to all mankind, and that all circumstances of his birth were the same as for all other people. And further, he declares of all the kings of the world that they had no different birth than that of other men.

So where did this endless variety of birth, founded upon heraldry, come from? And how is it that they are not ashamed to boast of such a lie, invented by pagans, using it to elevate themselves above other people and to scorn others, calling them "plebs," "dolts," "hogs," and "wretches," ³ as if they were openly despised like dogs? And let no one compare themselves to this supposed nobility, for in both the Old and New Testaments, I have found many references to nobility, yet never in the sense of this heraldic nobility. For Scripture says: "the nobles of Israel," "the noble cities," "the noble women," or "many noble women believed," ⁴ and "in the city of Berea, they were more noble than those in Thessalonica." ⁵ In all these instances, Scripture associates nobility with a virtuous life and wisdom, which includes the honour of moral maturity. Even among pagans, some were endowed with wisdom and suited for courts and governance, and such were considered the nobility of a city. Moses, in selecting leaders, always chose the most upright, and these were called the noble or distinguished among the people. And this could be just, that nobility should be granted according to divine or human wisdom. But the Jews knew nothing of this heraldic nobility or of noble lords, for their twelve tribes descended from one father, living in brotherly equality without numerous noble lineages or banner-bearing lords. ⁶ They had a king, Saul, whom the Lord took from the plow and made king, and David from tending sheep. ⁷

So if we consider these matters, I do not know on what basis the nobles claim their birthright to be above that of the peasants. By tracing their lineage back to Adam, they are born no higher, and by the wisdom of God and a virtuous life, few of them would be found worthy. For the pride that is born with them from the womb and follows them to the grave does not allow true wisdom to reach them. As Scripture says: "Wisdom is far from

2 Wisdom of Solomon 7:1, 3-5. [Apocrypha]

3 Common insults for peasants.

4 Acts of the Apostles 17:4.

5 Acts of the Apostles 17:11.

6 Bannered lords were those who led people into battle under their own banner.

7 1 Samuel (1 Kings) 16:11.

pride." ⁸ Thus, they base their nobility solely on coats of arms. But this comes from the pagans and is a fabricated notion. For every coat of arms likely originated when someone once served an emperor or a king, demonstrated some valor in battles or attacks, and was thereby granted honour and praise above others. They received a coat of arms as a mark of their deeds. Or they might have entered service and attained an office, receiving a coat of arms from the king accordingly. From that point, they were considered better born than a peasant, and their lineage, by virtue of this coat of arms, became nobler than that of a peasant. Therefore, this is merely an invention of wretched men.

Behold what this invention has led to, and how many sins have been committed under these coats of arms! It is not far removed from idolatry, or even entirely equal to it, for it holds as much significance as a painted half of a horse. Yet, the delusion of human folly reveres a wooden idol with divine honour, as if that idol were something great. In the same way, this half of a horse has inspired such arrogance in fools under the same delusion, so that they may swell with pride over this half-severed horse, committing much wrongdoing and believing themselves to possess some inherent goodness—just as in that lifeless idol, which has none. And for this imagined and invented goodness, they go so far into injustice, just as their lineage leads them into it! And just as their nobility and so-called goodness are built on falsehood through their coats of arms, so too do they multiply their wrongdoing through this invented nobility and goodness. In all of this, they worship the devil, glorifying such fabricated lies with their sins, claiming divine honour for themselves through such a vile, imagined, and fabricated falsehood. They commit all manner of evil and still demand to be honoured and praised as good men. They refuse to be rebuked or criticized for their noble virtue and seek to prove their goodness everywhere with errors and grave sins.

Humility and patience never suit their goodness. For the moment they endure anything humbly, they are immediately called a coward—"He does not dare to defend himself, he allows one more wretched than himself to ride over him!" Therefore, to remain "good" in their eyes, they must defend everything with strife, insults, revenge of every kind, threats, lawsuits, battles, and duels. Through such deeds, they drive away anything that opposes them and remain "good" by daring to strike others, so that the lowly may not scorn them. And the more evil they can be in these sins, the better they are, according to their coats of arms. Such behavior is fitting for their nobility.

Just as a harlot clings to a man solely for fornication, so too does noble lineage, marked by coats of arms, pursue such injustice at every turn, seeking false praise from it. And it has now gone so far that sheer disgrace is considered an honour, as their godlessness

⁸ Ekklesiastikus 15, 7.

proves to be a shame and a mockery of human nature. Men wear shirts down to the ground; their tunics are so tight they barely cover their backsides, and their hoods cover the saddle of their horses.⁹ – With monkish hoods and plowshares;¹⁰ or short cloaks, and long hair flowing down to their shoulders, with a curled hat shaped like a cone. They look as if they were peering out of a fireplace, no longer knowing what kind of monstrosities they wish to make of themselves. Likewise, women make themselves ridiculous, piling so much fabric onto themselves that they can barely move, with invented fashions and beauties that are not beautiful at all, their heads broad and towering high with a horn,¹¹ walking like the renowned harlots of the Pope, to the wonder and scandal of the entire world. And this is the goodness of their nobility, that it breathes injustice.

Nowhere can faith be so terribly defamed by pagans or Jews as it is by these noble lineages founded on coats of arms and unjustly mixed into the faith. Above all, they stand in opposition to the crucified Jesus, for their entire existence is an open blasphemy against his shameful cross. They act in defiance of it, doing everything for worldly glory. And yet, they sit at his table, wishing to partake in his sufferings. For all these reasons, they are displeasing to God and harmful and burdensome to the people. For all the common folk who toil under heavy burdens must bear the weight of their noble lineage, while they devour the poor and seize everything good found on earth. They do immense harm to all people, for they take everything upon themselves, corrupting others like a foul, rotting carcass that spreads its stench and brings death. Just as a leper quickly infects all around him, so too does their noble goodness—the belly of iniquity—breed generations of men, clothing them in wickedness. First, they dress their children and servants in their ways, teaching them the pride and courtly manners of their lineage. The townspeople, more than halfway, follow them, dressing like them, adopting their life of indulgence, pride, flattery, deceit, bowing, gluttony, and arrogance. Thus, they are a great scandal to mankind, just as the introduction of idolatry was. Though people may not see it, their nobility, built blindly on falsehood, is filled with abundant lies cloaked in honour. They have rejected all simplicity and humility of Christ, and the people follow them into the same ruin. Therefore, if we measure them by faith, they are the very death of faith. And since the angels, when mixed with pride, could not remain in heaven because of it, how much less can these sinners, wrapped in pride? Having inherited pride by birth in everything they do, how do they expect to enter heaven with it?

⁹ Most likely a reference to the long tails of hoods.

¹⁰ The "radlice" was a pointed hood with openings for the eyes, mouth, and nose, fastened under the chin with ribbons and buttons, ending at the shoulders like a small collar. [c.f. capirote]

¹¹ The "rohem" was a cone made of cardboard, covered with expensive fabric, placed on the head and wrapped with a veil. [c.f. hennin]

But so that those who read these things may understand why all this is written about the noble estates and their extreme opposition to Jesus Christ and his painful cross: it is mainly to make evident in them the Antichrist, who has introduced all defiance against Christ. And the greatest of these acts of defiance is that he has given a place in the faith to those in whom faith neither exists nor can exist, due to the particular traits they bear. He has established them in the faith through his spirit, which is opposed to Christ, and placed them on the path to salvation through his lies, reckoning them as belonging to God, even though they are the fiercest enemies of His cross and displeasing to Him. This relates to the words of Saint Paul, who, speaking of the Antichrist, calls him the man of sin, the son of perdition, who has come with all deception of unrighteousness, according to the works of Satan.¹² Here, all deception is clearly evident: that the fallen paganism has been painted over with faith so that it appears as Christianity. In this way, the entire world, having turned away from God, has been falsely consecrated to Him through the lying spirit that is opposed to God, in order to push Jesus Christ aside so that he may not bring about salvation in people. For the Antichrist has seized control of all and brings salvation to the whole world through his hypocritical and deadly lies. And it is easy—since the world itself desires it—to receive such salvation from his hands. Therefore, the world will not believe in salvation as Christ offers it to those who stand on the narrow path. That is why the Antichrist, in opposition to Him, has established salvation through lies for all the sinners of this world who walk the broad path. He has clothed it in deceitful holiness and, by this means, has rejected Jesus Christ and taken the people away from Him, so that Christ may not work salvation in them through His righteousness and power, by which He can save those who are willing to follow Him. Thus, the noble estates, being fundamentally led astray by the Antichrist, are attached to the faith while carrying all the defilements of paganism, so that the work of the Antichrist may be clearly visible in them. For by their way of life, which is opposed to Christ, there is not the slightest trace of true faith in them, nor can they use it for any good while living as they do.

And in this sense, the discussion will continue further about other deceits that the Antichrist has introduced into the errors of this world, glorifying paganism and his many heresies as if they were the true faith and the service of God.

¹² 2 Thessalonians 2: 3, 9-10.

CHAPTER FIVE

Cities are deceitful, opposing true faith, fostering hypocrisy, and aiding Antichrist's rule

Now the discussion will turn to the deceits of the cities, which, by the power of the Antichrist, stand against Christ. They form an evil alliance, full of boldness in carrying out wicked deeds, aiding one another in fiercely battling against righteousness and oppressing it under the guise of hypocrisy—speaking honourably of it in a hospitable manner within the gatherings of a

wicked and audacious band of tricksters, walking the path of Judas. Thus, these urban deceits have grievously torn the net of faith when they were counted as part of the faith along with their urban peculiarities. They resemble pagan rule, being strengthened by it, and are similar to the noble estates crowned with coats of arms, as they pull many things together under one yoke. The deceits of the cities have greatly multiplied and have become a strong foundation of the world and the strength of the Antichrist, for it is through them that he succeeds against Christ. For this reason, faith, like a net, could not encompass so many deceits and remain whole; they have torn it apart with their defiance of the truth of Christ. Only false and lifeless signs of faith remain upon them, along with the deceptive name of Christianity.

Every city contains so many contradictions to faith within its foundation and structure that it cannot accept true faith or bear it peacefully. For example, a city will not tolerate the pure word of faith being preached, for its foundation is opposed to the truth of Christ and therefore to faith itself. Likewise, it does not tolerate those who sincerely embrace faith and wish to follow it in action; for such a person, according to faith, would have to separate immediately from the people of the city in their conduct, agreements, assistance, and will. Since the well-being of the city depends on people desiring to live in peace so that there may be harmony among them and that they may all pull together under one yoke, any discord or uprising within the city threatens this unity. Such divisions could lead either to their own destruction or the loss of the city itself. Therefore, all their caution, diligence, and counsel are based on ensuring that they do not lose their city through internal discord or external enemies. A thoughtful person should consider where this course leads.¹ If their way of thinking were truly faith given to them by God, consisting solely in preserving the city's peace however they could, then they would easily remain in faith. But when one considers that faith is something entirely different—that it does not preserve such civic unity, that it demands obedience to its own will, and that it does not even always uphold peace in life—then bringing faith into the city's harmony would be like attempting to fill in their trenches, tear down their walls, and strip them of their security. That is how warmly they would welcome faith, for the faith of Christ is directly opposed to the particular nature of city life. Thus, a city will not accept preachers of Christ's faith, but only preachers of learned scholars and papal teachers. It will accept preachers who preach themselves, its trenches, and its walls—those who say, "Unless you build a second wall around the city, I will not remain with you." Such preachers will the city accept instead of a follower of faith. The city will tolerate no one else, except blind old women and crippled old men who sit begging at the church, who have no homes in the city nor fields around it. But if any true follower of faith,

¹ The original text reads: "kam ta zmítka padá" [where the zmítka falls]. The "zmítka" was a ball to which, as a target in the game, the other balls were thrown. [c.f. bocce]

possessing such property, were to walk among them and separate himself from them, declaring that they wrongfully and sinfully enjoy their peace, he would not be able to remain among them—except perhaps by some unnoticed compromise, allowing someone less wicked than they to live among them.

Thus, the masters of Basel, considering the peculiarities of city life and the peculiarities of God's law, did not hesitate to reject God's law for the sake of the city's people. Instead, they left them only human laws, declaring that the city's ruler should establish laws suitable for the people, which they could easily observe, ensuring that nothing within them would disturb the common good. They stated that the common good consists of the city's peace and that any law that would disturb the community, disrupt its peace, and burden it with obligations beyond its capacity would do more harm than good. Therefore, they rejected God's law for the people of the city, just as new wine is rejected by old wineskins, which would burst from its pressure.

And this is correct if we take as a foundation the idea that city folk do not need God, that general well-being is enough for them, and that harmony and peace alone will suffice. And if such reasoning is futile for Christians—to be content with general well-being in bodily peace—it is entirely fitting for pagans, who have no hope in God and do not believe in His law nor see any need to follow it. But for Christians, this cannot be claimed, except as a means to deceive them. However, for those who live according to the flesh, zealously guarding the common good of the city, they are so bound by these laws that they accept nothing from faith beyond the advice of Basel, namely, that only the laws of the magistrates should govern the city folk in their common good, ensuring peace among the people so they do not break apart from God's law like wineskins bursting from strong wine. Thus, faith among them stands like an ossuary filled with dead bones, which they do not fear, knowing that the bones will not arm themselves against them at night. And so, among them, faith is so blended under the name of papal laws that they ensure the Gospel and Epistles are sung to them so they will not grieve over them nor engage in disputes about them. This makes it clear that the Gospel, as it is written, is aligned with them, not disrupting their fortifications, city walls, corridors, or cannons, not forbidding the call to battle, not overturning their lavish tables, nor declaring other poisons to be poison. Whatever tunes are sung in church, they do not provoke anger among the councilmen. Thus, the faith of Christ's Gospel is dead among them and invisible, causing neither fear nor joy, nor can it be understood by those pot-bellied men who reek of beer. For amid such confusion and mixture, it is tangled up in songs and false and dead symbols, in sacred signs under which all

lies pass more honourably than under an outright idol. This alone robs them of faith: spiritual deception and sacred fraud, where lies shine as the path to salvation. And secondly, faith cannot take root among them because they hold so strongly to the preservation of the common good, ensuring that every resident of the city remains loyal to his fellow citizens and thinks only of protecting their collective well-being, pulling the same yoke together. For the Lord Jesus says: "I did not come to bring peace to the earth, but a sword, to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother." ² Therefore, if one or many are separated by the Lord Jesus from their friends and the world, they must forsake the common good of the city, which protects only bodily peace, whether rightly or wrongly. For as long as nothing disrupts or disturbs their peace, they are grateful for it, even if they misuse it, growing in wickedness under its shelter. But if evil arises and threatens to disrupt their peace, they seek to defend it with equal wickedness, and whoever can best help them quell the disturbance, they will align with him. Thus, those whom the Lord Jesus separates from such a harmful peace—how could they reconcile with it or remain loyal to it? Therefore, if some were to truly accept faith, there would be division within the city. Then, the multitude of the wicked would immediately turn against Christ's followers; if they did not kill them, they would at least rob them and drive them out. So when faith does not disturb the city's unity in any way, it is proof that there is no true faith in anyone—only a rotted faith, like wood hollowed out by worms, which has neither strength nor use. Such frail faith is harmful to the true faith of Christ, like darkness overshadowing light, laying snares for it, oppressing it, and driving it out as though through deception. For this counterfeit faith, forged from error, pampers many sinners—only nurturing the household enemies of Christ's cross and all His chosen ones, domestic traitors like hounds tracking prey, skilled at sniffing it out, hypocritical and cunning men, clothed in worldly wisdom, the most harmful adversaries to Christ's faith and its simplicity. Thus, city folk can uphold such a faith and be born into it in opposition to Christ, as the worst kind of fraud bound together into an inseparable bundle of enmities so that they might strongly stand together against Christ and all pure faith by every means of opposition, with which the people are filled. And whoever devises the worst evil among them must either be supported by the best among them or fall into the hands of the wicked. Therefore, their alliance has the full nature and substance of a conspiracy, where they work together and assist each other in their wicked deeds with great boldness. And they always

2 Matthew 10: 34-35.

move toward the oppression and humiliation of faith; whenever they recognize it, they attack it with cunning unity, persecute it, set traps for it, and disgrace it with their customs, which resemble those of pagans, alongside all enemies of the faith, who are outside of it—pagans and Jews alike. Under the guise of this false and dead faith, they do all things as true pagans.

Their deceit is founded on an evil foundation—on Cain. And just as they stand in wickedness and act wickedly, so must their corruption grow from its very root. But if they were entirely outside the faith, like true pagans, not creeping under Christ's suffering while falsely claiming to share in it and usurping a union with Christ—if they were simply pagans without this deception—then it would be no surprise that they pursued their deceit for the benefit of their bodies and the world. For if they considered only earthly and temporary life to be good, as ignorant pagans do, who could blame them for striving, by any means possible, to achieve bodily well-being according to their ignorance—whether by power, deceit, or blindness? I would see them as merely ignorant, leaving it to God to judge their pagan ignorance according to His will. But here, I consider it a corruption of faith when paganism is mixed into it—when it seeks to enter into fellowship with the faith or even participate in the faith of devils. By this association with devils, they oppress what they still call good within the faith, so that faith may continually diminish, perish, and be suppressed by injustice at the hands of those who align with devils. They greet faith deceitfully, like Judases, covering their abominations with signs of faith and verbal confession. In doing so, they constantly deaden and extinguish faith in themselves and others, pushing it into oblivion. By means of falsehood, they count themselves among the faithful, yet they are the most dangerous and insidious enemies of the faith from within.

CHAPTER SIX

Cain's creation of cities represents violence, deceit, and self-preservation through corruption

But Master Protiva,¹ speaking about the foundation of cities, states that Cain built a city because of the murder of his brother. The reason for its construction was that he had amassed wealth through robbery and violence. Thus, he used the spoils of his thefts and transformed the simplicity of human life into cunning and deceit by inventing land boundaries, weights, and measures, leading to corruption. He was the first to set land borders and fortify cities with walls. Fearing those he had harmed and plundered with his gang, he gathered them in his cities. This is how Scripture and scholars explain the first foundations of cities.

Therefore, Cain is credited with the origin of cities and fortresses, and that because of murder,

¹ Wycliffe, in his treatise *De civili dominio*, chapter 21.

robbery, and violence. For Cain, out of hatred, killed his brother Abel and became a fugitive and wanderer on the earth, fearing for his life.² Thus, he was the first to build a city, then went on to plunder others and commit violence against them, amassing wealth through these robberies. He gathered wicked men for looting. Later, he built more cities, settling them with bandits so that he could defend himself against those he had wronged by force. Murder led him to build cities, and the cities led him to unlawful plundering. For a people cannot shut themselves within a city for the sake of war unless they rob others by force to sustain themselves on stolen goods and defend themselves against the rest.

Thus, just as cities and fortresses were founded on Cain's example, so they stand today, following the same path. For no one could populate cities and castles except murderers and violent men, usurers, merchants, traders, and swindlers—those who thrive most on deception and greed. Therefore, when cities and fortresses are founded, and the city people are established on such injustices, they must also protect them through violence and oppression of others. They are always prepared for murder, for they are constantly surrounded by enmity, injustices from others, and betrayals. They are always ready to settle such enmities with blood, repaying evil with evil. If they have a strong city for defense, they plunder and commit violence against others to grow wealthy, provoking many against them and thus stirring up war. This inevitably entangles them in a cycle where they struggle only in bloodshed and plunder, fighting and preparing fortified places for battle. And if they lack the strength and boldness to rob others violently and start wars, they at least have it in them to ensure they do not suffer violence from others. Therefore, all city dwellers are prepared to defend themselves against injustice, risking their lives to the death—seeking to kill others while offering themselves up to be killed.

Thus, in order to preserve their lives and possessions by building a city, they must shed blood. And desiring to spill the blood of others, they must also offer their own in return. And so, this urban and noble lineage, which protects its life in castles, fortresses, and cities, always laments in the blood of its brethren, oppressing them with violence. Therefore, it is the lineage of Cain, the first murderer. And with such a way of life, it cannot free itself from murder. For when bodily peace and temporal wealth are made the foundation and cities are built and populated for that purpose, certain conditions must be added to ensure the original intention is fulfilled—that they are always fortified, constantly watched over day and night, so that no one may overrun them, slaughter them, or seize their possessions. And if anyone appears with hostile intent, seeking to steal or cause harm, immediately, without delay, the bell summons all the city's people to kill.

2 Genesis 4: 8, and 14.

If they catch a thief or a traitor, they show no mercy and will not rest until they have spilled their blood.

Thus, from the very founding of a city, its people, in order to maintain their lives and possessions in peace, must always be on the lookout for the blood of anyone who would dare to lay a violent hand upon their unjust gains. The entire care of the city is directed toward ensuring that, having secured a refuge, its people can repel any misfortune. And if we assume that the intent of city dwellers is to preserve their lives and property in peace, as they desire, then none of God's commandments concerning love for one's neighbor can remain among them. For in order to preserve their well-fed peace behind walls, they will rob some by force, deceive others with cunning tricks, and violently lay hands on those who oppose them, depriving them of life. Since they fortify themselves and dig moats so that they do not suffer injustice in life and property, they must always repay evil with evil, defending themselves against wrongdoing. Thus, all commandments that require Christians to be patient and forbid self-defense and vengeance must be broken. "Do not take revenge yourselves, beloved, for the Lord God says: 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay.' Therefore, if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink."³ All these divine commandments must be violated if people wish to preserve their lives behind walls in such peace. And the injustices they commit among themselves are resolved in courts according to pagan laws, often enforcing injustice under the guise of justice, violating Christ's commandment, which instructs to give up even one's cloak along with one's tunic and to abandon disputes in court.⁴ Thus, neither toward their neighbors nor toward God does any of Christ's commandments remain among city dwellers. Evil is preserved behind the walls, woven together in a shared cunning. But Jesus' beloved disciple says, "This is the love of God: that we keep His commandments."⁵ And we cannot receive His grace in any other way except by keeping all of God's commandments. Since not even one of these commandments is upheld by city dwellers, they have no part in God's grace and cannot have it, living in so many transgressions and entanglements that there is no way for God's commandments to reach them. Therefore, the prophet speaks of them in terrifying words: "I have seen violence and strife in the city. Day and night, wrongdoing is on its walls; injustice and violence are within it. Usury and deceit do not depart from its streets."⁶ A harsh indictment and an unpleasant accusation against those who wish to do everything with honour! Let the fat and wise of the city erase this from themselves if they can! But if a righteous person were to send them such a letter in council,

3 Romans 12: 19-20.

4 Matthew 5: 40.

5 1. John 5: 3.

6 Psalms 55: 10-12.

they would puff up with pride; those hearts swollen with arrogance would say, “He slanders the good, he slanders the councilors!” Thus, without any doubt, the Scripture is fulfilled that saw violence and strife in the city—a city of injustice, where every form of wrongdoing, hateful to God, thrives. A people bound together in cunning cannot uphold any of God’s commandments, nor can those commandments find any place among them, for their very way of life makes it impossible. And since God’s commandments are absent, they violate them all. Therefore, all manner of sin must be abundantly multiplied among them. Vengeance and bloodshed have been poured into their foundations from the moment the ditches and walls were laid. Then, pride follows close behind their coats of arms, leading them into greed,⁷ upon which the city stands—gluttony, drunkenness, bodily pleasures—adultery, fornication, shameless loves, illicit affairs, scandalizing one another, living together disgracefully, speaking obscenities, laying traps for each other like pits dug to break a man’s neck. Pride ensnares them like a net in all things, like noble houses crowned with coats of arms.

Everything they do, they wish to carry out with honour and praise in the eyes of the world, equating themselves with noble lords in their entire outward appearance—clothing, food, drink, houses, chambers, rooms, and beds. And whatever they do, they always say: ‘Let it be honourable!’ Except that their latrines stink more disgracefully than those of the village ‘boors’; everything else they wish to have with honour. And greed is their natural disposition, so that each one seeks to gather whatever they can. Because this people, enclosed within walls, have little farmland for their multitude, yet they have set themselves to have the rich man’s lavish tables,⁸ grand and costly houses, and much other wealth, they must earn for it however they can—through trade, markets, commerce, taverns, crafts, and usury, as the Scripture says⁹ here, that usury and deceit have not departed from its streets. Each one aims deceitfully at his brother, to cheat him and to fill his own purse; to rob him of what he ought to share with him; and whatever he sees in him that pleases him, he seeks to deceitfully trick him out of it. For all faithfulness and brotherly love have been extinguished. Therefore, “they hunt every man his brother with a net,”¹⁰ says the Lord God. Thus, usury here is abundant, both openly and in the lending of money against farmland and meadows for a fixed term, to be used until that time; and if he cannot repay within the term, he loses a valuable thing for a small loan. And they have many usurious practices among themselves, so that some grow rich at the expense of others, and the wealthy consume the poor through these methods of usury. And if it is not outright usury,

7 In the margin of the 1521 edition is written: “He recounts the city ordinances”.

8 A reference to the rich man from the Gospel of Luke 16:19 and following.

9 Psalms 55:12.

10 Micah 7:2.

then it will be disguised under the pretense of some supposed mercy or justice.

Therefore, the true father of these city people was Cain in many ways; for he transformed the simplicity of life into deceit by inventing weights and measures. Before this, the people were so simple that they easily traded one thing for another without weighing or measuring. But he imposed on them, on those wicked ones, that prices must be set according to weight and measure. That is why these people have great wisdom in this: having weights and measures, they keep larger ones for themselves ¹¹ and smaller ones for others ¹². And if their measures and weights must comply with the mayor's regulations and be accurate, then they simply set the price outrageously high. And whatever they weigh or measure, they know how to falsify everything: storing spices in damp conditions or mixing in small stones to make a light item heavy on the scale; likewise, they mix grain with chaff from the bottom. Thus, they commit devilish deceit against one another to cheat, whether in markets or trades.

Therefore, these people have come straight from Cain's very womb, full of deception. For the sons of Hagar, possessing wisdom that is of the earth, were merchants and Temanites ¹³, but they did not know God's wisdom. Likewise, this people is full of earthly wisdom mixed with deceit, serving their greed and the cheating of their brothers—so that, by their brothers' losses, they may prosper in this world and succeed all the more, the more cunningly they can deceive them.

Thus, a great wound was inflicted upon faith when such repulsive trickery, through the workings of the Antichrist, was mixed into it, along with all manner of transgressions and opposition to Christ Jesus. Under the guise of faith, they trample it on earth and pull it to themselves, making it conform to their ways—until, eventually, when they fully take this trickery among them, it leads faith behind it, commanding it to tolerate them and not impose heavy burdens on them. Thus, faith has been entirely ruined by the many wicked acts mixed into it through the lie of the Antichrist, which has taken power under the mask of faith, dragging it behind, while faith itself cannot show any strength in its righteousness.

And this trickery forms the foundations of the world. That is why they will not easily let go of faith to deny it outright, but neither will they hold it properly or truly, for their foundations and their inventions stand in opposition to Christ. For if they truly wished to serve faith, it would fill in their ditches, tear down the walls around cities, castles, and fortresses, and pull them out of all the bloodshed and other particularities of city life, where the power of the Antichrist is strong against Christ. For if they truly wished to follow faith

11. i.e. during the purchase, when receiving goods.

12. i.e. during the sale, when handing over.

13. Genesis 25:12 and 15; Jeremiah 49:7.

they would have to abandon all those things. In contrast, now, by cunningly clinging to the faith, they will most easily handle it falsely, showing it with their mouths and fingers, in order to hold onto it and carefully lead it to the gallows.

Therefore, the city is a vessel of diverse poison, spreading its venom to its inhabitants and all those around it, leading to death those who join it—like the people of Sodom, who burned with lust, drunkenness, and indulgence. It poisons all foolish visitors with its drunkenness, wickedness, and corrupt examples. Almost all the rural folk adopt its pride and gluttony, learn its deceitful trade, follow its fashions, and immerse themselves in its pleasures.

Thus, the city is like a leper covered in many shades ¹⁴ of leprosy, infecting people in various ways with its disease. For the city holds all that is pleasing to the flesh—bodily security, pleasures, false honour with flattering courtesy, but only on the surface and for visitors, while in the marketplace, it bares its wolfish teeth against all. That is why so many are drawn to live in cities, and those nearby become accustomed to their ways, feeding on their delights. Therefore, one must be strong in faith to resist the poison of the noble and urban classes. And a priest, entering among them with the intent to guide them to the right path, will be poisoned and led astray before he can even set them straight. They will lure him with their tables, pouring stronger beer, sending gifts, flattering him, until he unknowingly finds himself on their path. Before he can teach them wisdom, they will have turned him into a fool, to the point where they mock him, saying, "Look, the priest got drunk last night at the feast and was unable to tend to the sick." Thus, he stands among them like a dead man, and it is this corrupt people who will bring the gallows upon him before they ever understand him.

From this, we can understand how much evil comes from an unwillingness to suffer and how far it can lead people away from faith and virtue. This is evident in city and castle dwellers, who, wishing to preserve their lives and property in peace so that no one can easily seize them by force, fortify their city with walls and moats and fill it with people who can defend it against the evils they refuse to endure. And once they adopt this mindset, they must embrace everything that city life entails. Thus, dwelling in the city

¹⁴ c.f. Jan Rokycana's *Postilla* (published in 1929 by Šimek, Vol. I, p. 250): "On lepers, there are spots of various colours, some red, some white, some blue, some ruddy."

leads them into the iniquities associated with it. And the root of all this is their unwillingness to suffer, their refusal to endure injustice for God's sake or for their own salvation. This unwillingness never leaves them—as long as the walls stand, they will continue fighting for their injustices; and as long as they fight, they cannot follow the faith. Therefore, nothing can drive out faith more than the city dwellers' rejection of suffering, for true faith cannot exist without patience. A city fortified for defense is thus the greatest enemy of patience, and the greatest snare for those who, in faith, are called to endure injustice. That is why Saint David saw in the city wickedness and strife, and in its midst, toil,¹⁵ for the city burdens its inhabitants with countless labours—to build it, to fortify it, to guard it day and night, to fight and wage wars for it. Citizens endure many hardships for their cities. But beyond this, they also suffer under the weight of sin, for the pursuit of wealth in trade requires much toil. And before pride is satisfied, what expenses, what efforts must be spent on it! What burdens do gluttony and drunkenness bring! What struggles and hatreds weigh upon city officials! How much useless labour do the priests bear! All these labours are imposed upon cities by sin, making their burden heavy with wrongdoing. That is why the Lord Jesus, seeing the city in such terrible toil, wept over it,¹⁶ for he saw that in all its suffering, it had found rest—it had been struck so often that it no longer felt pain.

But this should be considered—if people are to recognize the harm done to faith and understand where its corruption has come from. It stems solely from what is said about cities. And whoever has attributed such godlessness of these deceitful factions to *faith*, and has incorporated them into faith through lies along with all their abominations, *that* person is the man of sin, the son of perdition,¹⁷ who does not see open paganism as a sin. Or, put differently, he is the domestic Antichrist, the mortal enemy of Jesus Christ, who seeks in every way to put Jesus Christ to death. It is he who has falsely incorporated these detestable urban deceits and other iniquities into faith through lies, so that this deceptive falsehood, named "faith," might protect all these wicked deeds—falsely attributed to Jesus Christ—so that His true faith would be cast out by these evildoers, who are the very strength of Antichrist against Jesus Christ.

Therefore, the Antichrist established cities under the guise of faith through his lies, along with all their iniquities; and the bloody deeds of the cities, the killings they commit, he counts as service to God. Even the deceitful praise of God, which he instituted among Christians with his grand deception and which he most strongly enforces in cities: building great churches, casting large bells, and ordaining many priests and clerics so that in the midst of those murderers,

15 Psalms 55:11.

16 Luke 19:41 and following.

17 2 Thessalonians 2:3.

the most glorious service to God is performed—but no further than with mere shouting and chanting in voices contrived by proud and lascivious priests and students. Therefore, this man of sin glorifies such a multitude of sinners with the praise of God and his orders through lies, soothing their consciences so that they do not see their sins as sins, but rather the gravest sins as service to God. And if some sins trouble their conscience, he provides them with ample indulgences, blesses water for them, and places a holy water stoup¹⁸ by the door so they may wash their sins away.

Therefore, who can speak of the corruption of faith or count the adversities by which faith has been corrupted through these city frauds and others? For the man of sin, feeding and growing rich on sins, leads such a multitude of sinners under faith through his lies. Thus, he has been able to introduce so much scandal and adversity to *faith* that it has vanished from people, fallen into obscurity and oblivion, as if it had never existed in the world. And most of all because this man of sin has glorified his scandals and adversities against faith to the world *as* faith itself, with great praise, so that he might proclaim his scandals as divine order and praise to the world. Therefore, for him, the abundance of sins is a profit. Thus, he has been able to present his errors to the world as faith, and he thrives on them abundantly and richly, gaining honour and praise in the world through them, and has pacified many nations in their sins with his errors, glorifying his lies to them as service to God.

18 i.e. a "basin".

CHAPTER SEVEN

Monastic orders' begging undermines their spiritual mission, causing harm and scandal

Now, we will talk a bit about monastic orders.¹ At first glance, nothing bad should be said about them because they have, in a way, abandoned the world for God's name and dedicated themselves to a life of spiritual devotion. They have chosen places and ways of living that support piety, separating themselves from worldly life as if they were dead to it. This is a high calling, and the world does not easily accept such a service to God. For this reason, I would have nothing to criticize—if only they truly lived according to their principles. Outwardly, they separate themselves from society through their location, clothing, monastic rules, and other customs. They are supposed to be the closest to God's service. However, their actions often contradict their sacred way of life. If they bear a great name and appear holy but are stained by wrongdoing, everything else collapses. Neither a great name, nor holy rules, nor even the most diligent observance of monastic customs

1 In the margin of the 1521 edition is written: "... talk about Munich [= monastic] orders."

the most diligent observance of monastic customs can save them. Thus, no special traditions can help these monks if they, despite their outward separation, secretly hold onto the world, imitate it in some ways, or even desire power, wealth, and empty worldly glory. They claim to live in poverty, taking vows to own nothing and trust only in begging. They commit to not running businesses or practicing trades but instead rely entirely on charity. However, this way of life is problematic and dangerous for society. It is not right for so many monks, along with their servants, to live purely by begging while enjoying a comfortable life with plenty of food, drink, clothing, and grand buildings. Their monasteries resemble military camps or noble palaces. The cost of religious ceremonies grows as they acquire expensive vestments, golden chalices, embroidered cloths, paintings, bells, organs, and other decorations—all funded through begging. This kind of endless, insatiable begging is bound to become excessive because such a lifestyle cannot be sustained without constantly demanding more. True monks, if they had truly renounced the world, would not be so eager for wealth, nor would they need to grasp at other people's property under the pretense of poverty. This unchecked and shameless begging is driven by greed, burdens the community, and causes scandal. The monks even compete with each other for alms, focusing on collecting for their own table rather than truly serving God. Since there are so many of these begging orders, they place a heavy burden on the community, constantly demanding peas, seeds, poppies, cheese, grain, fish—whatever they can find in the market.

Such greedy and endless begging is unworthy of both Jews and Christians. Among the Jews, begging was forbidden by God's law; if it existed, it was only due to disobedience. In Christianity, there is no foundation for a life of permanent begging because the Apostle says, "If anyone does not work, neither shall he eat."² Strong monks, as healthy as horses, should not live off charity when even elderly farmers still toil. Some monks argue, "Even if we don't do physical labor, we perform more important spiritual work—praying and offering

2 2 Thessalonians 3:10.

Masses for souls in purgatory.” Listen, monk! Even Saint Paul and other apostles, while preaching the Gospel and performing spiritual duties, still found time to work for their own livelihood without resorting to begging. Therefore, neither Jewish nor Christian teachings support such bottomless begging. It is only upheld by long-standing habits that serve greed, laziness, and a life of indulgence without labor.

The damage caused by these begging monks is great. In their constant seeking of alms, they fall into corruption, indulgence, and drunkenness. Even without begging, they have become careless and distracted from true spiritual matters. Instead of leading peaceful, God-centered lives, they run through streets and markets, peering out of windows and seeking distractions—when they are supposed to be withdrawn from the world in prayerful solitude. Yet, among all the monastic orders, none truly follows the strict rules they have set for themselves, let alone God’s law. As a result, spiritual peace and devotion have become rare among them. Nowadays, people have lost the practice of true contemplation and solitude. Instead, they chase after distractions and fill their hearts with empty things, contradicting their own supposed intentions. Their prayers are rushed, mechanical, and cold; they quickly abandon them, as if fleeing from something unpleasant.

And so I say this about begging: When it is endless and constant, it is far removed from Christian justice. These monks go around publicly displaying their poverty, claiming they lack food and drink. At the same time, they boast about their good deeds—how they pray for others day and night. They expect that their supposed spiritual wealth should compensate for their material poverty, hoping people will take pity and offer them cheese or other food. But to those who truly understand faith, this is a dishonest trade and a disgraceful practice. Any honorable person would be ashamed to engage in such a thing, as if caught stealing—because even a thief might eventually be ashamed of begging too much. Such actions are neither in line with faith nor appealing to the world. Instead, they stem from either cunning deceit or entrapment in their own situation. These monks have tied themselves to their begging orders with vows and do not dare to leave,

fearing both their conscience and punishment from their fellow monks. If they tried to escape, they would be caught and imprisoned. So they drag themselves along, like horses yoked to a cart, forced into begging—even when they find it humiliating and unbearable.

Thus, these many different begging monks bring harm to the faith, mislead people spiritually, and deceive them materially by taking their possessions.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Crusader monks use symbols of humility to gain wealth and power

But there are also other orders of crusader monks and canons.¹ These groups have cleverly crafted rules to accumulate wealth and power, attaching large estates to each order, with one rule here and another there, along with distinctive garments that appear to represent more humility and holiness, as though they were more pious under their intricately tailored habits. However, these habits attract more income than the simple white robes and other modest clothing with a white cross on a red cloak. In this way, these orders have become associated with strange and comical symbols, which suggest a special kind of holiness, as though one order is holier than another. The colour of the cross—whether white or red—is meant to indicate who lives the holiest life. Over time, these orders transformed into symbols of humility, patience, and purity while also gaining power and wealth, especially among the wealthy monasteries. Some even own entire regions, where they can suddenly collect large sums of money and all kinds of grain. They serve God wisely, remaining silent and devout, with so many servants that they can eat and drink in silence. They devote themselves to deep prayers. Kings, princes, and nobles are buried in their silent halls, as people believe their souls have a better hope than those of the beggars, because these monks, with their great wealth, are always at prayer. Their eternal prayers, they believe, will eventually save even the indulgent souls from the deepest pits of hell. The wealthy monks' lands have expanded so much that kings and princes have fewer possessions for their own reigns. Sometimes, these orders place heavy burdens on the kingdoms, as the monks oppress their subjects and give taxes to the king, while still taking full payment for their services. If the king had them under his rule, he could get by with a single tax. As a result, the people in their domain are often worse off than those who belong directly to the king.

¹ Chelčický is referring to canonical monks, such as the Premonstratensians or the Crusaders.

CHAPTER NINE

Monastic factions represent Antichrist, opposing Christ's law and true unity

This discussion about the errors of monks may seem rather useless in itself, but it might be helpful for understanding other matters. That is why I would like, if possible, for something useful to come from these reflections.

Earlier, I wrote about the various deceitful ranks that have infiltrated the faith, tearing it apart so that only scraps remain here and there. I also included the words of Jesus about true unity—the unity into which He leads His people—and how these ranks and deceptions are completely opposed to Christ's unity. But here, I specifically highlight how each of these ranks demonstrates its opposition to Christ and His law. To understand this discussion, we must recognize the greatest work of the Antichrist, who is Christ's most relentless adversary. The Antichrist has established these various deceptions under the guise of faith, each with its own form of opposition to Christ. He is the head of a fragmented and corrupted body, a force of many disguises that stands against the spirit of Jesus. This becomes clearer when we consider Christ as the head of all His chosen followers, who together form His spiritual body. This body is united in divine faith and love, just as the various parts of one body belong together, thinking only of serving and helping one another. This is how Christ's spiritual body expresses itself—by supporting one another through love, serving each other without any obligation except to love with God's love,¹ and drawing all spiritual strength from their head, the Lord Jesus.

Now, to show the opposite: Since the Antichrist is the greatest internal enemy of Christ, hiding under the same cloak of faith, he too has a head—one that is utterly corrupt—and a body that resembles him in evil and opposition to Christ. The deceitful ranks form the Antichrist's body, divided among themselves and governed by separate laws, each believing it serves God in its own way, each seeking its own gain, claiming honor and privileges over the others, despising the rest, yet all united under their corrupt head and fiercely opposing Christ.

I have identified the emperor's and the pope's powers as Christ's main enemies, as they derive power from one another and act together against Jesus, wielding both worldly and spiritual authority.

1 1. John 3: 11.

The greatest Antichrist could not be so powerful against Christ without the support of secular power. Thus, these two heads contain all the resistance to Christ, and this resistance spreads into the Antichrist's body, made up of many deceitful factions. Each faction opposes Christ in its own way, but all stem from these two heads, following the imperial and papal laws, which contradict Christ's law. These factions sustain the power of these heads, and the heads, in turn, embody the strength of their factions. In this way, they collectively and individually oppose Christ and His spiritual body, even while being internally divided and quarreling among themselves. The secular power struggles to control them, preventing them from completely destroying one another. These factions are so corrupt that they harm and burden each other, seeking their own gain at the expense of others. Some use political power to oppress and exploit. Others engage in commerce, enriching themselves at others' expense. Others use religious authority to deceive and devour people through false piety.

Because these factions make up the Antichrist's body, all their distinct oppositions to Christ work together to suppress and extinguish Him. They claim to be under His faith and share in Him to some degree, yet, filled with the spirit of the Antichrist and the devil, their every action is aimed against Christ. Their goal is to suppress His spiritual power and virtues so completely that, among those called Christians, Christ has no true authority or power. Anyone who follows Christ's teachings has no place among these factions of the Antichrist. This is evident today—Christ's law and His true followers are pushed aside. Only a few, by faith, still hold to Christ, but His law is silenced. These deceitful factions, forming the Antichrist's body, have taken over every corner of the world—secular and religious offices, castles, fortresses, cities, monasteries, parishes—directing their entire existence against the crucified Jesus. They are filled with the spirit of the most hostile enemy of Christ, carrying out actions that contradict His law.

That is why I have pointed out, in brief, how this enemy opposes Christ, especially by falsely claiming Christ's authority and power. This head of the Antichrist pretends to have the right to forgive all sins and grant salvation to sinners, making it seem as though all matters of salvation depend on him. In doing so, Christ Jesus is left outside, like a helpless outcast,

unable to carry out human salvation according to His own justice. The worst Antichrist falsely assumes the power to grant salvation through deception, denying Christ's rightful role.

CHAPTER TEN

Urban powers and troops embody the Antichrist, opposing Christ's law

Before speaking further about the factions that make up the body of the Antichrist—especially those crowned with coats of arms—I have already said that they are numerous and deeply opposed to Christ Jesus, for they carry the spirit of the Antichrist within them. These powers stand against the life of the Lord Jesus and fiercely protect their leader, ensuring that no one dares to speak or act against him. In their pride and depraved ways, they dishonor the Lord Jesus, continually devising new corrupt schemes that mock His suffering. Likewise, the deceitfulness found in the cities serves as the very throne of the Antichrist, where his spirit is poured out most recklessly. For the spirit of the Antichrist is well suited to the people of the cities, who, having cast aside Christ's sorrowful law, instead submit to the laws of magistrates. These laws do not lead them toward virtue but only maintain public order, granting them full bodily freedom like that of pagans. The Antichrist, setting himself up in place of God on earth, promises them salvation not through Christ's law, but by his own power—multiplying church rituals, consecrating everything for them, and offering abundant indulgences. This urban deceitfulness eagerly embraces the spirit of the Antichrist, which grants them license to indulge in their bodily desires. They are also fierce enemies of the spirit of Jesus, for the moment they sense His presence among them, they rise against Him. If anyone were to challenge their Antichristian laws or their pagan ways, even in the slightest, they would be thrown into turmoil, immediately convening councils to determine how to protect their peace, ensuring that He does not expose them or stir unrest in their society. Thus, the Antichrist has firmly entrenched his spirit in cities, castles, fortresses, and monasteries — standing in direct opposition to the spirit of the Lord Jesus, His life, and His law.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Monastic groups embody the Antichrist, leading people astray

I further assert that these various monastic knaveries, divided against themselves, under the guise of lawful goodness, under the veil of false humility and holiness, go against Christ and his law with a wicked spirit; yet they have the heart of the Antichrist within them and his spirit. Just as the people teach and establish the world with their

prayers and their religion, preparing salvation for the world through their faith, they abundantly pour out the spirit of the Antichrist onto the world and poison it with many delusions for their own gain. But this too is the folly of human ignorance, that many groups are divided by special laws, garments, manners, and reverences, each group preparing its own sanctity before the people, so that it seems to the people that their holiness is superior to that of those who eat meat. Thus, with these special additions, they entice people to themselves for their own pleasures and enchant the people, causing them to praise one and not the other; and so they follow them, thinking they will find their salvation with them.

Therefore, these groups, with their sacred peculiarities and humanly glorified appearances, leave Lord Jesus as a broom behind the door, as even the high monasteries have no great bells or loud organs with deep pipes, nor do many sing at the pulpits. And so, with such glories, they are manifest members of the Antichrist, who tear apart the people and entice them to themselves with these glories, with the spirit of the Antichrist, greedy and false, under the disguise of religion. They spread their poison into the world and numb Lord Jesus, causing him to be forgotten by the people, so that, gazing at their magic called the praise of God and service to God, they do not think about whether they owe God some other service than drinking the poison of these wicked hypocrites to his honour.

Therefore, I believe it is necessary for wise people to understand how these groups are the body of the Antichrist, widespread everywhere, being full of his spirit, repugnant to Christ Jesus, as they constantly make offenses against Jesus Christ according to their peculiarities and the poisonous spirit of the Antichrist. Before him, few, or hardly anyone, can stand, for neither the master nor the priest, neither the clergy nor the laity, neither the wise nor the foolish—none are left, except for those upon whom God's grace is miraculously shown, through which they could stand before the spirit spread by the Antichrist, which came in every form of iniquity ¹ and spread among all the chosen ones. Having this spirit spread everywhere, it confirms the executioner, the bailiff, the mayor, and the hermit. Therefore, it is a wonder of wonders if anyone escapes the spirit of the Antichrist, who dwells among all under the appearance of the Holy Spirit, placing the feet of all on the footsteps of the Holy Spirit, as the Antichrist himself, taking upon himself the power of God, offers salvation to all through that power.

Therefore, the wise should all the more carefully consider these groups, in which the Antichrist has the greatest power and his spirit is spread. And no one is safe from him, even in sleep. For at the beginning, the apostles with great vigilance

1 2 Thessalonians 2:10.

avoided him, but we, like the remnants of his works, must now say this: among many thousands of people, it is difficult to find anyone who is not mortally wounded by his spirit. Nor is it possible for anyone to escape him so easily, only those who have the illumination of the spirit of Jesus and the strength of God; such a person can escape from this spirit.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Monastic groups falsely follow Christ's law, promoting humility without true faith

But regarding these matters spoken here about monastic orders, they live with this belief: Since the Lord Jesus blesses poverty, humility, prayer, and other virtues that serve God, then monks, by practicing such virtues, are blessed and fulfill Christ's law by choosing this way of life.

To this, I say that it is praiseworthy if someone truly fulfills Christ's law. However, it should not be lightly stated that the many monastic orders, divided against each other into various restless spirits, can truly fulfill God's law. For Christ's law—if one believes in it—unites people into one heart and one soul.¹ But monastic orders each have their own separate rules, created according to their own ideas, and they reject the rules of other orders. Because of this, many of their laws have produced distinct monastic groups, setting them against Christ's law. Thus, while God's law may be fulfilled in some aspects, people do not fully submit to it. People tend to think that in following Christ's law, confusion arises among some individuals, allowing them to perform certain actions prescribed by Christ's words but with a false or foreign spirit—one that twists and distorts the law. A false, deceitful spirit can manipulate Christ's law to make its deception seem more honorable and respectable than if it were openly false. It dresses false intentions and hypocritical devotion in the appearance of piety, making use of scripture and Christ's law to conceal lies. This allows monastic deceit and its followers to be protected under Christ's law through a false interpretation. Otherwise, such a great number of false Christians could not exist, nor could the Antichrist remain among Christians for so long, if he were not using faith itself to spread deception—leading people falsely under a foreign, deceitful spirit while outwardly appearing faithful, yet opposing Christ in their unbelief. Thus, much

1 Acts of the Apostles 4:32.

wrongdoing arises from a foreign spirit or false interpretation of scripture and God's law, which can be called an "adulterous" ² understanding or explanation of scripture or faith. The devil's goal is to corrupt faith, twisting it into a false and misleading meaning, so that people are led by lies disguised as faith, placing all people into deception through false interpretations of scripture. Even sacraments given by God—such as baptism, repentance, and the body and blood of Christ—while true in themselves, are often administered without their proper meaning or effect. They lack the true qualities they should have, making them of no spiritual benefit, since they are given to wicked people with dead faith—those who have no love for God and only observe external rituals. Such people remain blind in their dead faith, merely touching the sacrament physically and saying, "I receive God, I see God, I recite five Our Fathers as penance until Pentecost." However, in doing so, they act under a false spirit that does not transform the sinner's life or evil will, deceiving themselves. They believe they repent simply by reciting five Our Fathers! Thus, Saint Paul, recognizing the danger of adulterating faith, says of himself: "We do not act dishonestly nor do we corrupt the word of God, but rather we proclaim the truth sincerely." ³ To adulterate the word of God means to give it a false meaning, misrepresenting it, or twisting its true message to fit one's own purposes—clothing a falsehood in scripture to make it seem true. Therefore, when people misuse scripture, applying it incorrectly or drawing false meanings from it, they commit spiritual adultery. Evil people often distort scripture for their own gain, ignoring its true message and instead using it to justify their own desires, profit, or to condemn others and indulge in worldly pleasures. Thus, a false spirit always seeks to deceive both itself and others through scripture. As a result, people cannot truly follow scripture properly—they act against their own conscience when they claim to follow it, for they do not truly live by it. They may perform certain outward actions, but they do not genuinely act according to scripture, as they are driven by personal gain or fear of being criticized by others. They observe scripture superficially, but not with conviction.

2 i.e. "false". To "adulterate" scripture meant "to distort or falsify its true meaning."

3 2 Corinthians 4:2.

The same applies to monks: they may observe much of scripture and base their lives on it, yet they do so with an adulterous and deceitful spirit. This often only appears to be true obedience to scripture. For example, their humility is shown through wearing worn-out, distinct clothing that sets them apart from others and even provokes ridicule. Because of their clothing, it may seem that they practice deep humility and have renounced the world. But challenge their humility with just one opposing word, and you will see them bristle and bare their teeth like wolves, threatening violence. Beneath their monk's robe, they may hide a sword or dagger, barking, "Man, do not insult me, or you will pay the price!" Thus, their supposed humility is only a false display—it is called humility, but it is not true humility.

Their humility does not match the words of the Lord Jesus, who says of such people: "They do all their deeds to be seen and praised by others."⁴ Moreover, they promise salvation to others through their supposed good deeds. They place great value on their own actions, as they offer others the hope of salvation through them. Yet a truly humble person fears that their good works may be unworthy—perhaps tainted by impure motives or otherwise displeasing to God. For Jesus tells his followers: "When you have done all that is commanded of you, say: We are unworthy servants."⁵ In such an attitude, there is no room for boasting. One who truly follows Christ acknowledges their unworthiness, rather than priding themselves on their deeds or promising others salvation through them.

4 Matthew 23:5.

5 Luke 17:10.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Monastic poverty is deceptive, driven by greed, human invention, and contradiction

This also applies to the poverty of a monk; if it were genuine, it would be blessed; but if it is insatiable and suffers no shortages, then it is only *called* poverty. Although he may not have many good treasures, he can gather enough to live in abundance, just like someone who has treasures. Therefore, he is called poor, having rid himself of the deficiency of poverty. And others, the townspeople, might agree to this poverty as well, taking up the excuse of a life of eternal begging, so that they can beg so much that they would have more abundant tables than their neighbors, who earn much greedily. And when the poor monk has gathered such abundance at his table that he refuses beef, and excellent peas, interspersed with fatty bacon, because he turns up his nose at it, looking for venison, birds, and other more delightful foods than peas, he has certainly begged well along with his fellow monks,

managing his affairs through begging better than many a young squire who owned two or even four acres ¹ of land and a large estate.

Even more distant from true poverty is such a begging monk. Since he constantly begs, he would not disdain if gold were offered to him; the greedy monk would accept it and shove it into his bag, buying fields from which he could take rents, thus abandoning the rule of begging and preferring to be a lord, singing to God in peace. Therefore, even though he may not desire it, he must remain in the begging order, where they give a little seed, unwillingly, when they do not give gold. Hence, unwillingly and against his will, he is poor, not knowing how to become rich and unable to find the path to wealth. Therefore, such poverty is fragile and very deceitful, capable of lying a great deal. And their deeds are all the more dangerous because they come from human invention. For their rules originated from human invention, only that they have some embellishment from God's law, and these embellishments and inventions of the orders are tinted with a foreign and false interpretation of God's law, so they take on a sacred appearance, as if they were born from God's law. To prevent these inventions from standing on their own, they are adorned with names of holy poverty, barefoot walking, a rope instead of a belt, a contemptuous hood, this or that cross, sad notes of a multi-part song with interval jumps, longer hymns than others, the refraining from eating meat, silence, some form of bowing or prostration, some special suffering above others, vows of chastity or other embellishments. With these various adornments, these invented rules are clothed, in which there is no power to save, because they did not originate from God, nor could they have.

Therefore, since God has established one law for all who believe in Him, a law so just and sufficient for the salvation of each person that no better law could be established thereafter: He could not establish many other laws, lest the first law be dishonoured or revoked, for that would dishonour even Himself, if, after introducing the true and perfect thing, He were to bring in another to corrupt the first. Therefore, He could not establish many laws that would contradict each other, creating many orders that would be mutually conflicting, as He despises them in His own family. For He wants His family to be of one bond, united in love, having works like His, established by one law, so that their number would be together one body of Christ, who eat the body of Christ from one bread and drink His blood from one chalice. Therefore, from these things, it can be clear to the wise that whatever God could not do for Himself

1 The original text translates to: "three or even six korcũ of land"; where: 1 korcũ = 0.69 acres.

and for His people, must necessarily arise from humans in opposition to God. Therefore, establishing service to God in this way means acting in opposition to God, and this service is very incomprehensible. Furthermore, declaring such an opposing service to God to be better than other services to God, and that not only could it bring salvation to those monks, but that they can also sell it to others for salvation—these are dreadful and dangerous matters with these embellished rules. About them, Master Protiva says: ²

² Wycliffe in the work *Dialogus* in chapter 20. Chelčický quotes him according to the Czech translation made by Jakoubek of Stříbro.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Human laws and monastic orders oppose God's law, leading to blasphemy

"It is clear that those who created monastic orders did so without God's approval. Those who defend these orders or follow them fall into grave sin. Therefore, the first people who established and invented these orders without God's confirmation sinned. A person who creates a special, eternal law for themselves is essentially defying God because they interfere with what belongs to God alone. In doing so, they also dishonor Jesus Christ by refusing to find Him sufficient. Again, it is said: Since Christ established one true and complete law for all people and all social classes, without the need for additional special laws, His followers should be satisfied with it until Judgment Day. Abandoning Christ's law and following other laws is a grave sin. Likewise, prioritizing human-made rules over God's law is the same as rejecting God and choosing something else in His place."

Wise people should recognize the truth behind these words, noting the external glory of monastic orders, which the world admires and sees as angelic brilliance. Many believe that nothing is closer to God, so they donate their wealth and entrust their souls to the monks' prayers. But when the truth reveals the falsehood behind this glory, it will become clear what man has established without God's approval. What did man do? He sinned and blasphemed against God. He founded a monastery upon this. Upon what? ¹ Upon a grave sin and blasphemy against God. One follows the other: as is the foundation, so is the service to God. If the foundation blasphemes God, so does the service.

¹ In the margin of the 1521 edition is written: "On what is the monastery founded?"

However, people find it hard to believe these things because they seem so unlikely. But the wise should reflect on how true service to God is now unknown. Many religious practices are based on human errors, yet they are wrapped in a false holiness. These traditions, established long ago, are accepted as sacred, even though they are actually harmful idols disguised as holiness. Because of this deception, people have turned away from God and His law and instead worship demons hidden within these false religious practices. The following saying is helpful: ² "To abandon Christ's law and follow man-made laws or rules invented by sinners is the same as rejecting God and choosing another in His place." These are serious matters. A person cannot turn away from God's law without first rejecting God. Every departure from God must be to some created thing; as soon as someone prefers a creation over God, that creation effectively becomes their god. It is easier to see this when a person openly chooses sin over God, but it is more insidious when this happens under the guise of religious devotion and obedience. When someone follows man-made laws, believing they are serving God, they think they are engaged in true worship. Because they cannot find such grand religious ceremonies elsewhere, they refuse to believe that they have rejected God. This deception is not only dangerous for the simple-minded but also for the wisest scholars. Even monks struggle to recognize that their religious practices, built on human traditions, could actually be blasphemous. Their hearts cannot accept such an idea. Only those with a correct understanding of God's law can see the truth. The first people who created and enforced these laws as if they were eternal for all followers could not have done so without first rejecting God and His law. Their arrogance led them to believe they could create something better for salvation than what God had given. Thus, in their actions, they despised and blasphemed God.

Later followers of these monastic rules may not have initially introduced this blasphemy, but by continuing these practices, they confirm and reinforce the wrongdoing even more than those who originally established the laws. Therefore, people should have this understanding of God's law: that they should never abandon it for worldly gain,

2 Wycliffe (see above).

physical pleasure, or even spiritual or moral goodness unless God's law itself commands it. Only someone with a true understanding of God's will would act in this way. We can see this principle in God's words to Joshua, Moses' successor: "Be careful to obey all the law that Moses, my servant, commanded you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left."³ These words highlight two possible paths: one to the right and one to the left. God commands that we should not deviate from His law in either direction. The right side represents good things, while the left represents evil. Both can lead people away from God's law. On the right, there are noble, religious, and sacred things that appear spiritually good but may actually hide lies. On the left, there are clear deviations such as heresy, idolatry, sorcery, and superstitions that directly oppose faith. If we apply this understanding to God's words, we see that a person should not stray from God's law toward either deceptive holiness or obvious evil. However, it is difficult to recognize falsehood when it is covered in a holy appearance. The only way to distinguish true faith from deception is to understand that God's law is already sufficient. It provides every form of goodness that a person needs to follow. No human-made rule can be equal to or better than God's law. Even if the best person in the world created the most respected law—promoting virtues, suffering, purity, humility, poverty, or other religious practices—it would still not be God's law and could never be. Such a law would be fundamentally flawed and opposed to God because it does not come from Him. Therefore, human laws lead people into conflict with God.

Human laws that appear glorious on the outside are actually Satan's deception. Foolish people, dazzled by their appearance, think they are following holiness when they are actually being misled. Eventually,

³ Joshua 1:7.

these laws reveal their emptiness because they are based on lies. Following human laws leads people to neglect God's law. They become so occupied with human traditions that they forget about God's law entirely. This is a great tragedy. Because of the outward holiness of these laws and their religious ceremonies, people can abandon God's law so completely that they do not even think about it or recognize it. This is a great insult to God. A person cannot live rightly without God's law. Without it, they are spiritually blind and lost. Human will alone cannot establish a righteous life—it must align with God's will. And God has chosen His law as the path for all who seek His grace. To unite with God's will, one must follow His law. Doing so grants access to His promises and blessings, which He gives only to those who fear Him and obey His will. Living in agreement with God brings His grace and help, which no human law can provide. Those who follow man-made laws become attached to them, thinking they will achieve salvation through them. In doing so, they attach themselves to the person who created those laws. But since that person is not the source of divine grace, he cannot grant life or salvation to their souls. As a result, followers of these laws fall into spiritual emptiness and blindness, bearing only the heavy burden of physically following these laws without true joy. Only God's law gives understanding to the humble and enlightens those who align their will with Him.⁴

A second danger of human laws is that they lead people into spiritual traps, forcing them to break God's law in many ways. For example, young boys and girls are lured into monastic orders and bound by vows of celibacy. Many then fall into fornication and even unnatural sins. Had they been married, they might have avoided these mortal sins. But in the monastery, they do not know where their path will lead. Because they are bound by human-made vows, even if they recognize the right path according to God's law, they are not free to follow it.

4 c.f. Psalms 19:8.

They do not dare to leave their order for God's law, but they easily abandon God's law to remain in their order. If the monks are wealthy, they try to uphold the laws they have accepted for the sake of power but become entangled in the world and in many sins, squandering their wealth and using it wrongly. They also involve themselves in worldly offices and even acts of cruelty beyond what secular authorities commit; if they are poor, they quickly fall into even greater hypocrisy, into sacrilege, greedy pursuits, lies, deception, flattery, and many other sins, throwing themselves into insatiable begging out of poverty. Thus, human law places them in such opposition to God's law that there is hardly anything in which they do not transgress God's law due to the entanglements of their own laws. Therefore, could God's words be any more important when He says, "you shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left" ⁵ from God's law?

And it seems that straying to the left from God's law, into heresy and other errors contrary to faith, is harmful. But straying to the right, into service to God and delightful piety, seems acceptable. Yet be mindful that the right hand does not depart from God's law just as far as the left, separating one from God just as much as outright sin. For whatever does not come from God, even if clothed in the finest garments of God, will ultimately reveal the devil beneath. For whatever does not originate from God comes mostly from man and the devil, and whatever man builds together with the devil will be constructed in the same manner. And this work will not reveal itself immediately until the devil first examines whether its foundation stands firm. Therefore, he lays the foundation while calling upon God for assistance, adorning himself with God's good things so as not to be feared. He first recognizes that some good thing might be useful to him, allowing him to introduce wickedness to people either through it or under its cover. This he knows well, for his first work upon and against humanity was to present them with God while making them like himself. Thus, Saint Paul, seeing the necessity, warns believers: "Let no one deceive you with a false humility and angelic worship." ⁶ For the human mind is inclined to grasp anything spiritual and new, especially if it seems closer to the angels and radiates holiness, so that, embracing it eagerly, people might fall away from faith under Satan's glittering deception. We can see this now among many monks, who, standing beneath this false radiance, are not afraid to openly transgress God's commandments and openly oppose Christ's truth. In them, the work of the Antichrist is plainly visible, like servants in torn ranks, dressed in sacred forms yet divided into special orders, separated from each other for the corruption of Christ's law and the true goodness he established through his great toil and suffering. Instead, their own kind of goodness

⁵ Deuteronomy 5:32

⁶ Colossians 2:8.

now walks among them, claiming to bring human salvation and redeem souls from hell. Just as their leader, the Antichrist, through his reign and life of pleasure, rejected Christ's humble, labourious, patient, and suffering life, so too, through his multitude of laws, he has rejected Christ's law—so that everything would be done according to his own rules, and no one would ever ask about God's law apart from his own. By doing this, he has put Christ to death among the people and taken them away from Him. And he is able to do this across all lands, for through his followers and monastic orders, his wickedness can powerfully oppose Christ. For they are the great strength of the Antichrist, full of his spirit, poured out in many forms to ensnare all nations in his traps and spread his poison over all people.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

University scholars defend Antichrist, corrupt faith, and suppress God's true law

Now, about the status of university masters: ¹ among Christians, they seem to be like lights of the world, and it appears that the Christian faith finds its strongest support in their wisdom, especially in their virtues. In times of hardship, believers *should* find support in them—when the weak fall away, these stronger ones in faith *should* bear the burden. It seems they work so hard in learning precisely for this reason, and they claim they do it for faith, to defend it against heretics and other enemies of Christian truth. But their words, which they proudly proclaim, are not reliable, nor can they prove them in the present time of trial. I do not know whom their knowledge has truly supported in faith. Here is living proof against them: If Hus had not had a special strength from God, all the learning of the universities within the Roman Church would have suffocated his faith. For all those universities gathered against him in Constance. But kind God gave him the wisdom of the saints, so that the spirit of Antichrist, through all those ravens, did not have enough learning to extinguish his faith.

Therefore, if we look to the university masters' knowledge for the defense of faith, it is clear how they would protect it in times of trial—it could rightly be said that such injustice against faith could *not* have happened if there had not been so many of them with all their learning. Even the king's cruelty, with all his wrath, could not have harmed faith so severely. For that righteous man, ² and for the second ³ with him,

¹ In the margin of the 1521 edition is written: "concerning the ranks of masters."

² Referring to Hus.

³ Referring to Jerome.

and for all others who have even a spark of faith within them, their harsh trial would have been easier if they had *not* been burdened so much by these learned men in their time of testing.

Therefore, in response to the claim in their argument that without these university masters and their institutions, faith would perish and there would be no one to stand against the errors of heretics—if that statement were ever true at the beginning of our faith, it should be true now as well. However, even in the greatest darkness and confusion of faith, a movement for God's truth has arisen, as God willed, so that His truth would be proclaimed against the Antichrist and his followers. It is in times like these that the work of learned masters *is* revealed—a time when the Antichrist flares up in anger because his lies are exposed, revealing his opposition to Christ under a false mask of holiness. His pagan rule uncovered, his opposition to Christ's poverty and that of His apostles, his Lucifer-like pride, his Sodom-like immorality and bodily indulgences, akin to the rich man buried in hell,⁴ his shameless selling of holy offices, and all his other injustices - at *such* a time, we see *what* these scholars truly defend: their knowledge serves to *uphold* the greatest errors of the Antichrist. What the leading figures of Antichrist—popes, cardinals, bishops, abbots, and monastic and clerical orders—could not justify for their own benefit and false claims against Christ's truth, the university masters have managed to prove for them. Thus, these masters, as if mourning their father, the Antichrist, and his disgrace at the hands of the revealed truth, have dedicated all their learning to this cause. They convened two councils, one in Constance and another in Basel, lasting several years, with the aim of using their knowledge to set traps against the truth. They sought the power of the secular authorities so that what they decided upon through years of deliberation could be enforced by worldly strength, proving their "truth" by force. They have now fully secured imperial power to declare truth as heresy, condemn it, and crush it with the emperor's might. But God, who sees the thoughts and schemes of the unjust, did *not* allow them to achieve what they planned and devoted their learning to.

Their actions clearly show that their knowledge and pagan reasoning are the strongest weapons of the Antichrist—like an impenetrable shield against the truth of Christ and his followers. Without them, the Antichrist himself would not be able to defend his lies even halfway if he did not have these universities, filled with pagan learning, to support him. So, when they argue that without these universities, no one would be able to fight against heresy, this may indeed be true in one

4 c.f. Luke 16: 19

sense—if we turn their argument inside out. The heresies that the Antichrist has spread so widely would not be so cleverly defended by a simple peasant. A peasant could not twist every argument and turn heresy into "Christian faith" as skillfully as they do. They dress up lies to look like truth. A peasant would not be able to make the Antichrist's corruptions and poisons seem so appealing—while these scholars coat them in sweet rhetoric so that everyone eagerly drinks them in. They make everything the Antichrist has established seem spiritually powerful and necessary for salvation. They sanctify whatever he decrees, claiming it has the power to cleanse sins. Even the crosses they bless during mass are given a mystical significance, so that a scholar, sighing in wonder, may say: "Behold! Great spiritual mysteries are hidden in these crosses!" Because of this, they must be solemnly blessed, so that their so-called spiritual power is worshipped with devotion. They claim these crosses hold divine power while, in reality, our own earthly desires are paraded openly above all. But who could breathe such life into these empty superstitions better than the scholars trained in paganism? They praise them so highly that people become blind to the truth, believing that God's praise happens only in church. Meanwhile, they assume that at home and everywhere else, God is dishonored, and that people live in shame before Him—except for the clergy, who howl their praises to Him in church. And so, while peeking out from under the Antichrist's robes, they carefully lift his hem so that no one steps on it. They guide his every step to keep him from falling, as has been so clearly seen in these times. How many councils and assemblies have taken place where some, still holding onto the purity of Christ's faith and law, stood up against the Antichrist's scholars? How many false arguments and deceptive proofs were spread against the truth in Basel and here in Bohemia! During these debates, the original Church of Christ was put to the test. Even that, the scholars mocked, calling it foolish and claiming it upheld many beliefs without certainty. They insist that the present-day Church acts more wisely than that "foolish" one, arguing that, after careful consideration, the modern Church serves God better than the original one ever did. And what of all the other debates over God's law: the Holy Chalice, the preaching of God's word, the rule of priests, and the absolution of sins? ⁵ Nearly all of these were condemned as heresy. Even if they did not outright reject them, they treated them with scorn, as if they were false. They dismissed them with contemptuous and even blasphemous arguments, always finding a way to set them aside. Or, when they did accept them, they twisted them to fit their own agenda—like deceitful enemies who do not want to be seen as adversaries of Christ, yet work against Him in everything until they can destroy Him completely. For this is the true nature of the Antichrist's opposition: to always approach Christ with a kiss, like his predecessor Judas, while leading the crowd that will tear Him apart and spill His blood.

5 These are the well-known demands of the so-called "Four Articles of Prague".

In the debates that these scholars had with the Czechs over matters of faith, they spoke many disgraceful things about God's law. When they discussed the Holy Chalice among themselves, they said: "Even if it were God's command that the common people should receive the blood of Christ from the chalice, the Roman Church has the power to reject what is written in God's law and establish something else in its place." This clearly shows how the university scholars defend the faith—by ensuring that it never rises up again. Faith has long been trampled down so that it has no power at all. The Antichrist rules over faith with the help of his scholars, shaping it however he pleases. And if anyone tries to lift faith up, like pulling it out of a swamp, the scholars immediately use their learning to keep it down. The Antichrist knows very well that if faith were to rise again, he would fall from the Roman throne along with his crowns. If people truly believed in the Son of God with full and divine faith, then the Antichrist, with his pagan rule and Luciferian pride, could no longer remain among them. No one would care for him more than they would for any ordinary pagan. But as long as faith is suppressed and bound under his control, he swells with pride and rages furiously against it whenever anyone dares to speak against him. The Antichrist is determined to use faith as a cover for his own disgrace while using it to profit from people's money.

That is why we must take seriously how the scholars treat God's law—as if they have the power to overthrow it. It is not true that they study in order to defend faith and God's law. Rather, they use their cunning knowledge to corrupt faith and set traps for it. Faith is contained within God's law, and if God's law is cast aside, faith will perish along with it. This has long been the Antichrist's work ⁶—to reject God's law and replace it with his own laws. That is why God's law has been silenced for so long, while the Antichrist loudly proclaims indulgences and holy years to gather money for himself. Since God's law has been silenced, it is like a dead man buried underground—speechless, even as people trample over it. The old people who walk over it no longer remember who was buried there because so much time has passed. They do not fear it, nor can they say anything certain about it, so they live in peace with this "dead man." But if that dead man were to move his head, they would say: "That is the devil, risen from the grave to haunt us! He tells us that if we do not live as he did, we will suffer some dreadful fate in hell." Hearing such unsettling talk, the scholars immediately gather all the doctors of theology to bury the dead man once again

6 In the margin of the 1521 edition is written: "How God's law is rejected by the rulers of Antichrist, etc."

and return him to silence. Without shame, they boldly declare: "The Holy Church has the power to overthrow God's law, for the Church is greater than the law of God! The Church can bring salvation to the world even without God's law. And whoever does not seek salvation through the Church's guidance may rightfully be seized by force." Indeed, this is exactly what they seek to do, together with the scholars—to secure their peace by silencing God's law and those who follow it. For if God's law were to rise again, as if from the grave, it would overthrow the Church and cast it into the same oblivion to which it has consigned God's law. People would even mock it, saying: "Where is that Church that once boasted, saying: 'I am no widow, and I shall never know sorrow'?" ⁷

Therefore, those scholars who speak this way about the power of the Church, rejecting God's law, are laying traps—ultimately allowing the Antichrist to ensnare God's chosen ones. And this will happen through their learning. For they are so skilled that their knowledge now brings sorrow to the righteous. Since these scholars are the very heart of the Antichrist, they use their learning to abolish God's law, overthrow it, and set traps for it. They disguise and embellish the laws of the Antichrist with clever arguments to make them seem glorious, claiming that they have the power to determine human salvation. Because of this, it is clear that their true purpose is to impose burdens on the righteous—on those who turn to God's law and reject the poisonous laws of the Antichrist. However, if God does not allow them to have such power, then they will be unable to bring sorrow or even death upon the righteous. Yet, because they proclaim that the laws of the Antichrist are the glory of God, the order of God, the ancient Christian faith, and the salvation of souls, they incite worldly rulers and the powerful. Sometimes they even complain sorrowfully, claiming that certain stubborn individuals refuse to believe in the teachings of the old saints, break divine order, and abandon the ancient Christian faith. By saying this, they stir up pagan-minded people against their brothers, causing them to cry out angrily: "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!" ⁸ If foolish pagans could be so enraged over an idol, how much more anger will there be over an even greater, invisible idol? The blinded and deceived believe that this idol is the glory of God and their salvation! These people become even more furious in defending an idol in which lies are honored in the most harmful way. That is why the Church, together with the scholars, will gnash their teeth in rage at anyone who dares to challenge these laws or refuses to serve God according to them. Unless God Himself blocks their path, they will not stop trying to convince the great and powerful—those who claim to worship God with grand prayers—to be outraged by the supposed dishonor of God and the destruction of His praise.

⁷ Revelation 18:7.

⁸ Acts of the Apostles 19:28.

This will always lead to incitement and anger—especially against those who speak about God's law or explain it to others while disregarding the laws of the Antichrist. Some will mock simple people, saying: "Why do you concern yourselves with God's law, thinking you can interpret it on your own when you do not even understand it? You are spreading new heresies by rejecting the explanations of the old saints!" Even though they do not openly declare God's law to be heresy, they either remain silent about it or accuse simple people of spreading heresies through it. In doing so, they make it seem as if God's law itself is the source of error. If these scholars—who consider themselves wiser—did not look down on the simple-minded but instead tried to explain God's law to them, the common people would not resent them for it. Instead, they would praise God, rejoicing that He had opened the mouths of the great to speak His law.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

University scholars distort faith, abolish God's law, and serve Antichrist

But because they are the sons of the Antichrist, they would rather claim that the Holy Church has the power to overthrow God's law and grant salvation without it, following only the laws of the Church. They say that the Roman Church can place the people of the cities under the rule of secular laws, since God's law is not suitable for them—just like new wine poured into old wineskins, which would burst from its strength, as it is too much for worldly people to handle. And since the great council of scholars from many universities of the Roman Church, gathered in Basel, holds this view of God's law, they can easily reject it in places where it was never previously established or heard of in any congregation. They see certain people as so corrupt that if they were given God's law, it would harm them, just like new wine would ruin old bottles—it would trouble and burden them. That is why they claim that these people would actually become worse if they followed God's law. By speaking this way, they have already cast aside the law completely, rejected it, and removed it from the people whom they have raised in falsehoods—just as one trains a hawk for the hunt, releasing it to seize whatever prey they choose. Therefore, before these people—who have been fattened on lies—they can remain silent about God's law or insult it however they wish. Since they burn people at the stake for following God's law, declaring it to be heresy before the public, they will continue to treat such disputes over God's law as heresy. In this way, the scholars of these universities justify their claim that they study in order to defend the faith—understanding "defense" to mean ensuring that faith never rises up against their teachings. For in them, the Antichrist's power can be strongest, since his arrival is hidden in secrecy, under the disguise of false goodness

or holiness. He follows in the footsteps of Satan's works, committing all manner of hostility and opposition against Christ—yet disguising it as if he were serving and honoring Him. Thus, the scholars can powerfully defend his path, embellishing it and living in a way that mirrors him—excessively proud, puffed up by their knowledge, and indulging in pleasures. They are very much like noble lords, who inherit their arrogance and love of luxury, living in a way completely opposed to the suffering of Christ. Their views on salvation—both their own and that of others—are shaped by the spirit of the Antichrist and built upon his poisonous lies. Because of them, the lies of the Antichrist will gain great power.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Antichrist's apostles corrupt faith, deceive nations, and lead Christianity astray

Now, let us talk about the many groups of priests who serve as spiritual leaders.¹ If we look at the example of Christ's apostles, such priests should be the most essential to the Christian people because their duty is to care for human souls. This responsibility is greater than any other Christian virtue—when it is truly carried out according to the example of the apostles. The apostles, having received their pastoral mission from Christ, fulfilled it with sincerity and dedication. They led many people out of paganism, preached the gospel, and laid the foundation of faith so that believers could stand firm on God's word and follow His will. However, after them, the strongest and most powerful Antichrist was destined to come, leading all nations into deception and wickedness.² He appeared to be a man of faith and Christian goodness, taking positions of authority within the church. Through hypocrisy and lies, he corrupted the offices of the apostles, filling them with his own followers. These followers of Antichrist took over apostolic roles, carrying his spirit, so that from within the church, they could create the greatest opposition to Christ and His chosen people. Without these false leaders, Antichrist would not have such great power. He would not be able to dominate the world and bring every land under his control. But because he has spread his apostles far and wide, his spirit—hostile to Christ—has possessed all people and nations. His goal is to turn them against Christ and His law, removing Christ Jesus from their hearts and stripping them of His spiritual life, which is the life of grace born from faith in Him. This corrupt spirit of Antichrist has caused Christian people to become empty

1 In the margin of the 1521 edition is written: "On the convocation of pastors and other clergy".

2 Commentary on 2 Thessalonians 2, 10.

of Christ, deprived of the gifts of the Holy Spirit and spiritual light. They have fallen into deep blindness and rebellion against God's law, committing every possible sin—sins that are outright defiance against God. This is the state of the people whom Antichrist, through his apostles, has poisoned with his deadly spirit. He has killed Christ Jesus within them and turned them into a wasteland ruled by the devil. Their minds hold no wisdom, and their hearts have no justice of Christ. Instead, they have become like senseless animals, full of corruption and disgrace, as their actions clearly show. In such an empty and blind people, Antichrist can rest freely because no one opposes or even recognizes him. He devours everyone like an ox that mindlessly eats grass, and no one mourns as he leads them all swiftly into damnation. That is why he seeks to kill Christ, the true light,³ so that even if someone fears hell, they will not grieve but will rush toward it, falsely believing they are saved—misled by Antichrist's apostles. The purpose of their false service in church offices is to keep the blind people content in their errors and lead them into worldly deception. Without such apostles, Antichrist could not have ruled peacefully among Christians for so long. If the Spirit of Jesus were truly alive in someone, it would shake the earth and expose the world's sins. For this is the work of the Holy Spirit—when He enters a person, He convicts them, exposing hidden evils disguised as Antichrist's false holiness. But Antichrist's spirit does the opposite—it comforts people in their sins, using lies to take away their guilt. He is the "man of sin," spreading and multiplying wickedness across the world through his apostles. Through them, he has seized control of the earth and poured his lies into the world. His apostles use deception, flattery, sweet words, and false blessings to spread his false spirit, making people feel comfortable in their sins. Slowly, they are led further and further into sin until, eventually, sin is no longer seen as sin. Over time, sins become accepted and normalized. They are rebranded as virtues, traditions, respectable customs, necessary business practices, legal rights, and even the so-called common good. Under these disguises, people no longer feel guilty about their sins but instead gain honor in society. In this, Antichrist's apostles have succeeded. They have seized control of the earth, taken over churches, and bound people to these churches—along with their lands and properties—so that no one can escape Antichrist's influence. And through their so-called holiness, these false apostles pour out

3 c.f. John 1: 9.

Antichrist's poison, mixing it into their sacred rituals. They invite all nations to drink from the wine of the great prostitute, preparing it with deceptive sweetness so that everyone drinks eagerly.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Antichrist's apostles exploit faith for power, wealth, and worldly pleasure

The apostles of the Antichrist, spread across the earth, first gained power by aligning with rulers who opposed Christ and his true apostles. Their influence began with Emperor Constantine, who granted wealth and authority to the Pope, making him a ruler with royal power. Constantine ordered churches to be built throughout his empire and gave them land, as much as could be plowed in a day. Later, the apostles of the Antichrist took over these churches. Acting as clever managers, they expanded Constantine's orders, acquiring even more wealth: forests, ponds, taxes from people, and generous tithes. They put a price on every religious service, even selling church bells and land for burials. Because of this, they gained more earthly power than noblemen ¹ who ruled by secular law, taking possession of land through dishonest trade and manipulation.

Unlike Christ's apostles, who served people with humility, these false apostles desired power, freedom, and physical pleasures. They took on the role of shepherds, not to care for souls, but to enjoy wealth and comfort. They would not serve as pastors if there were no riches or personal safety in it. Proof of this is that many churches are now abandoned simply because their lands were taken away. These so-called shepherds refuse to tend their flocks unless they gain something from it. ² So, what do they truly care for if they rule freely and have no fear for their lives? Their actions expose them: they care for their stomachs, seek money, and deceive people. If they truly loved souls, they would work to save them without needing wealth as motivation. A raven does not care for a living horse, only a dead one;

¹ In 15th-century Czech lands (mainly the Kingdom of Bohemia, part of the Holy Roman Empire), the feudal hierarchy was structured similarly to the broader European system but with some unique elements: *Monarch* (King), *Princes and High Nobility* (Prince, Margrave, Dukes), *High Nobility* (Lords, Counts, Barons), *Lower Nobility* (Knights, Squires), *Non-noble landowners and townspeople* (Patricians, Freemen), *Peasantry and Commoners* (Serfs, Bondsmen). Squires were the lower rank of nobility.

² John 10: 12, and 13.

it does not mourn when horses suffer, but when a horse dies, it swoops down, cawing “Rach, rach!” in triumph. These false shepherds act the same way. As long as they can shear the sheep, milk them, and eat their fat, they pretend to be shepherds. But when there is nothing left to take, they abandon the living and the dead, caring nothing for their souls. They do not even pray for them after death. They are like ravens, waiting for corpses, not shepherds protecting the flock.

The greatest corruption of the apostolic office was allowing priests to gain political power. It is like placing dead bodies before ravens—it attracts the unworthy. True apostles gave up worldly possessions before beginning their ministry, knowing that only those who despise earthly wealth are fit to preach about heaven. But now, the worst people are drawn to priesthood for power and pleasure, despite lacking the knowledge, character, or love for souls. How can such men lead others to Christ when they themselves are only motivated by greed and lust? Instead of guiding the flock, they act like wolves among the sheep. That is why Jesus asked Peter three times: “Do you love me?” When Peter replied, “Lord, you know that I love you,” Jesus told him: “Feed my sheep.”³ Jesus made sure Peter truly loved him before entrusting him with his flock. Only someone who loves Christ above everything—above worldly possessions, even above his own life—is fit to lead his people. But these false shepherds have no love for Christ. They have never known him, and they do not care about his suffering. They are his greatest enemies after the devil himself. They enter the priesthood not to serve, but to exploit.

3 John 21:16-17.

They are like blind animals, completely detached from faith and Christ's blessings. They claim to serve God but only seek pleasure and personal freedom. This is why Saint Peter and Saint Jude, true apostles of Christ, warned against such men, calling them wells without water and clouds without rain, ⁴ brutish spirits, having neither wisdom nor desire for Christ. ⁵ Instead of guiding lost souls toward salvation, they lead them into destruction. A blind man following another blind man will fall into the pit. ⁶

Therefore, the greatest tragedy was allowing the church to become a source of wealth. It turned the priesthood into a refuge for greedy men who only seek power, not the salvation of souls.

This corruption is the key to the Antichrist's power. No other position in society could serve him better. By controlling the priesthood, he can influence people's souls and manipulate their beliefs. He determines what is sinful and what is not, twisting morality to suit his purposes. He offers salvation on his own terms, without Christ. He presents himself as Christ, deceiving people into thinking they are saved when he is actually leading them to death. He has subjected everything to his rule—people and even faith itself—so that he can oppose Christ fully. Using Christ's name, he blesses his followers and then hands them over to demons. First, he drains them for his own pleasures; then he delivers them to hell. And he does all this through his false apostles, who have taken control of the earth and spread his deadly spirit, erasing Christ from people's hearts.

4 Peter 2:17; Jude 12.

5 Jude 19.

6 Luke 6:39.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Antichrist's priests exploit faith through greed, coercion, and false legality

Another way these so-called shepherds oppose Christ is by taking control of churches with the spirit of the Antichrist, bringing many people under their authority in the name of shepherding while actually devouring them like greedy wolves. Their opposition lies in how they bind people through a business-like contract, forcing them to provide material benefits—tithes, offerings, and other payments—while they, in return, distribute sacred things. The priest, by law, then demands what he claims as his rightful due from the people. Not only does he remind them of their obligations, but he also has the power to enforce them—excommunicating people, suing them in foreign courts, and using the higher authority of the Antichrist to extract the profits he has falsely and greedily claimed. Likewise, the blind and deceived people go to the priest, demanding that he fulfill their supposed rights. Just as the priest insists on tithes by law, the people expect spiritual services as if they were legal entitlements, binding every person in the parish, including the priest, to a system of mutual obligation. Because of this, love, faith, and free goodwill no longer exist between them. Instead, everything is ruled by coercive law, invented by greedy and worldly men, concerning matters that should belong to faith and the salvation of souls. These things should be done out of love and faith in Jesus Christ. But here, everything is reversed and turned against Christ's truth. It is all governed by worldly law, just like the way earthly rulers govern their subjects based on legal obligations. To reduce the apostolic ministry to the same kind of system is to abandon faith. This is the way of the Antichrist, which stands in opposition to Christ and is utterly barren—without life or the ability to improve the conscience. It is nothing more than a dead legal custom, worldly and pagan, lacking any spiritual life. This dead custom leads to blindness and greed. The people, following secular law, demand spiritual things as if they were entitled to them by improper legal claims. In their blindness, they fail to understand whether they are receiving these things rightly or wrongly, whether they are worthy of them or not. They do not consider such matters; they simply follow custom and rely on their legal agreements with the priests. Similarly, priests who distribute spiritual things based on legal rights are also led by blindness and bound by greed. Since they have reduced their service to mere extortion under false legal claims, they must keep adding one demand after another, disguising their greed and unjust extortion as deserved payment and necessity.

The priestly ministry lacks true justice not only because

it is carried out under a false, greed-driven law that contradicts faith, but also because it has lost the justice of its original mission. These priests no longer use, possess, or even have access to the spiritual authority (the "keys")¹ that Jesus gave to Saint Peter and the other apostles. Since the pastoral ministry cannot be properly carried out without these keys, it is impossible for them to fulfill their duties correctly. Whatever a priest does in this ministry without these keys, he corrupts and turns into sin.

¹ The "keys" refer to the spiritual authority and power given to church leaders, particularly priests, to govern the faithful and administer sacraments. This is often symbolized by the "keys of the kingdom of heaven," a concept rooted in Christian theology, specifically in the New Testament (Matthew 16:19), where Jesus gives the Apostle Peter the "keys" to the kingdom of heaven, granting him the authority to bind and loose, to forgive or retain sins, and to make spiritual judgments on behalf of the Church.

CHAPTER TWENTY

True priesthood follows God's law; false priests exploit faith for gain

The "keys" should represent knowledge of God based on His law. A priest, having this knowledge, would be able to distinguish between what is pure and impure, recognize the difference between what is holy and what is cursed, and properly open the kingdom of heaven to the righteous while closing it to the wicked. However, because the Antichrist and his followers have long since rejected God's law, they lack this knowledge and cannot separate the pure from the impure. Without these keys, they govern large numbers of sinners using false laws invented by men, keeping them trapped in spiritual harm. Through this corrupted ministry, they falsely lead even the worst sinners in the world to believe they are saved, making all those who violate God's law feel as if they belong to Him through lies that oppose Christ. Therefore, Christ's true keys do not fit or belong in such a twisted system. These were the keys that Saint Peter faithfully used—separating the wicked from holy things, closing the kingdom of God to them, and allowing only the pure to enter. Peter did not do this based on guesswork but by examining good consciences and righteous deeds. He did not declare people to be evil out of personal bias, false accusations, or mistaken suspicion. Instead, he carefully investigated whether someone was guilty of sin by violating God's commandments or by lacking faith in the Son of God. If he had judged someone to be impure without such careful examination, he would not have been using true wisdom, but rather unreliable assumptions, false accusations, or personal grudges. In such cases, the keys would have no real power. Therefore, every person must be judged according to the clear teachings of God's law. Those who are proven to be unrepentant lawbreakers—who refuse to be guided by the priest's efforts to bring them to proper repentance, as faith teaches—should have the kingdom of God closed to them. They must be separated from the community of the righteous,

removed from any participation in Christ, and told: "Have no hope of receiving the reward of the just, for you oppose God, do not believe in His law, and refuse to repent. Because of this, you are on the path to damnation."

If a priest were to use the keys in this way, he would not be able to follow the man-made legal system that has corrupted the priestly ministry. According to true faith, he could not accept material benefits for his own needs from those who oppose God and reject His law. Since he excludes them from participation in God, it would be improper for him to take a share of their earthly goods, because they, in turn, would expect to gain access to divine things through him—something they are unworthy of as enemies of God. Thus, they could have no rightful claim to receive spiritual things from him unless he had first imposed a false legal right to extort from them. For this reason, a true priest must reject wicked legal systems and serve in faith, separating all sinners who violate God's commandments from holy things. This is where the true power of the keys lies—the knowledge and understanding of God's law—so that he can judge every person's guilt according to faith and divine law. He must determine whether they are breaking or upholding God's commandments and, based on this, either lead them to repentance or exclude those who remain unrepentant.

We have confirmation of these things in God's words. The Lord God commanded the first priest ¹ of the Old Law that when performing his duties in service to God, he must not drink anything that could make him drunk. This was so he could properly distinguish and judge between what is pure and impure, between what is holy and what is cursed. A drunk person or a fool who lacks understanding cannot serve God in a way that pleases Him. Later, God found that some priests had broken this command and accused them, saying: "The priests have abandoned my law and have not made a distinction between what is pure and impure, between what is holy and what is cursed." ² This clearly shows from God's words that He gave priests a law requiring them to always separate what is pure from what is impure and to properly use the keys of authority. The Lord God hates all impurity in people, and whoever carries any impurity is rejected and displeasing to Him. All impurity that affects people, or could affect them, comes from breaking God's commandments. Therefore, the priest's duty is to guide people toward honoring God by following His commandments. If he cannot, through his efforts, lead them to purity, he must separate and bind them as cursed before God. He must never falsely count an impure person as belonging to God or allow them to take part in sacred things. Doing so would break the law that God gave him, dishonor and corrupt his ministry,

1 i.e. to Aaron; c.f. Leviticus 10:8–10.

2 Ezekiel 22:26.

make his service detestable before God, and bring upon himself God's punishment for making his priestly duties offensive in His sight.

From these things, it is clear that the power and benefit of the priestly office come only from the keys of authority. Those who have these keys can distinguish between what is pure and impure and separate the unclean from the clean. This power and knowledge cannot be learned anywhere except in God's law because only God's law is pure. That is why those who follow God's law without corruption are blessed.³ No other skill or knowledge can teach a priest—or anyone else—what is pure or impure, except for God's law, in which God reveals what is clean and what is unclean before Him. Anything that goes against this law is unclean, and anything that follows it is clean. As long as the priestly office follows God's law, it is pleasing to God and benefits human salvation. But if priests lack the knowledge of God's law—if they do not know it and instead count people as belonging to God based on man-made rules or personal favoritism, aligning themselves with sinners who break the law—then their service is blind, godless, and corrupt. They bless and accept the wicked as if they were holy, even though these people are cursed before God. Such priests act against God's will and do whatever pleases them, to the harm of those they are supposed to guide. If priests abandon God's law in their duties, they are digging a pit of eternal damnation for the people—and for themselves—so that, as the blind lead the blind, both fall into the pit.⁴ The keys given to Peter were meant to be used according to God's law and wisdom, to recognize what is cursed and what is holy and to separate them. But these keys are far removed from the large parishes that priests have taken for themselves. Each priest has claimed as much land as possible for his church—some taking entire cities along with multiple villages, others securing large districts full of sinners. They have subjected the whole sinful world to their churches, dividing people among them, and the more parishioners a priest could claim, the happier and richer he became, filling his barns with tithes. But if a priest gains control over such a large number of sinners, how can he use the keys properly according to God's law, rejecting the impure sinners and closing heaven's gates to them? All these sinners would rise against the priest who denied them entry into heaven and cast them away as damned. In such a large parish, it may be difficult to find even one person who is truly pure. And if the priest were to follow the keys faithfully, he would have to shut heaven's gates to nearly everyone, for

3 Psalms 119:1.

4 Luke 6:39.

almost all of them are lawbreakers, unclean, unworthy of God, and unfit for His blessings. What then would the priest be to them, having condemned them all to hell? Nothing but a hated enemy, despised and unwelcome. The worldly people, ignorant of God, would not tolerate such a priest or a church with such authority and wealth if it denied them salvation. They built churches, donated lands, and placed priests in them like ravens over a carcass, expecting them to stay and grant them salvation—baptizing, marrying, anointing, blessing, and doing whatever they desired, content to sit on their "carcass." If salvation were denied to them after they had hired priests with such generous incomes, their anger would be great, and they would not endure such priests. That is why, if priests were to truly use the keys of Saint Peter, few would remain in their churches, and many would have to become martyrs at the hands of today's so-called Christians, who have long been led astray by the errors of the Antichrist.

This shows that claiming large numbers of sinful people for one church, forcing them under church authority through worldly power, cannot work peacefully on anyone except those who have abandoned God and His law. These priests become ravenous wolves and cawing ravens, lovers of corruption, ruling over others to enjoy wealth, bodily pleasures, a lazy life, and sinful indulgence. Meanwhile, their blind followers, full of lawlessness, know nothing good and have completely disregarded God's law, placing themselves under human laws and worldly power. The parish priest wants to subjugate his parish to extract wealth and income from them, ensuring they pay him as they would their lords. To do this, he must rely on the worldly authorities who granted him his church—those lords whose people belong to his parish—so they can force people to pay tithes and other dues. Thus, priests cannot elevate their ministry beyond being mere worldly officials, using secular power to enforce their demands. The people, in turn, expect to receive spiritual benefits from the priest—things concerning God and their hope for salvation—after having paid handsomely for them. The priest, being both master and shepherd, commands on both sides: he demands offerings and payments while ensuring people bring him what he most desires from the church. He uses the keys only to maintain his authority—pressuring the people, excommunicating them, taking them to court. This is how he exercises his power, not for the salvation of souls, but for control and material gain.

CHAPTER TWENTY ONE

True absolution requires repentance; false priests deceive through empty rituals

Secondly, priests use the keys when examining a person's conscience in confession and assigning penance. They claim to have the power to forgive sins simply by speaking certain words while placing their hands on the person, saying that once they do this, all sins are forgiven. But they absolve people who continue sinning without change—they commit the same sins again right after confession, without altering their will, intentions, or way of life. They keep doing the very things they were given penance for, even along with the penance itself. This is the lie of the Antichrist because simply declaring forgiveness is not truly using the keys—it is a blatant deception. God does not forgive anyone unless they first turn away from sin in their will, intent, and actions. So, their method of absolution, and their supposed use of the keys, is nothing more than a trick—like a magician's illusion that seems real but is actually a lie. Since these priests have abandoned God's law in their use of the keys, they have no real power to use them—not in thought, in action, or even in words. The only way to determine who is pure or impure before God is through the teachings of God's law. No one can make a person pure in confession or anywhere else unless they establish them firmly in God's law with a sincere heart. If a priest absolves them otherwise, he commits a great lie against them.

Therefore, the practice of assigning entire parishes to churches and enforcing religious authority through worldly power is part of the Antichrist's deception, fully prepared for all forms of opposition against Christ Jesus. It is completely contrary to the apostolic ministry and its freedom. The apostles were not sent to rule over restricted territories¹ but to preach God's law to all people everywhere so that whoever believes in the Gospel of Christ becomes His follower. The apostles demonstrated their ministry out of love, rejecting earthly wealth and corrupt power, which has now been mixed into the work of shepherding souls. Because they did not entangle themselves with worldly possessions or involuntary obligations tied to specific parishes, they were free to use the keys for all people, binding and separating even those who opposed the faith from holy things.

From this, it is clear that the use of the keys must always remain free for those who have gained true understanding of God's law and believe that the power of the keys can exist only according to the judgment and teaching of God's law. Then

¹ i.e. to the districts forming individual parish settlements..

such people must be free from the deceptions of the Antichrist, as previously explained—because those who perform their pastoral duties under human and worldly laws, entangled with secular power, cannot truly use the keys. Such priests are like ravens settled on a carcass, unable to fulfill their holy calling.

CHAPTER TWENTY TWO

True use of the keys requires justice, not favoritism or bias

The use of the keys must also be free from the magical thinking held by the Roman Church, which believes that certain words spoken with the keys have power over sinners who continue in their sin, even using them for unjust excommunications and other punishments, sending those who oppose them to hell. Moreover, anyone who wants to use the keys according to God's law and the bond of innocence must be free from false love and favoritism. For if someone is wounded by hatred toward certain people, they twist the meaning of justice, acting with cruel hatred toward them, binding their sins more heavily than God does. In this case, there can be no true teaching of God's law, and the keys will fail, as they would be used to shut the kingdom of heaven before God's judgment is declared. Similarly, false love and favoritism will willingly depart from true justice. Even though such people are unworthy before God, because they are priests' friends, they are invited to the table, offered gifts, sent over stale beer, spoken to sweetly, and praised by the priests. This softens the hearts of many priests, like Samson's heart when Delilah flattered him.¹ Therefore, if they do not forgive everything, they at least reduce the sins of such people by half, giving them blessings and claiming them as belonging to God.

Thus, to use the keys, the heart must be free from carnal affections, hatred, and blindness, which are rooted in the ignorance of justice, that justice found only in God's law. Therefore, many practice sorcery, but they do not truly use the keys.

¹ cf. Judges 16: 6 ff.

CHAPTER TWENTY THREE

Parishes under Antichrist's rule subjugate people, spreading harmful, deceptive teachings

If we still speak of these parishes, we can observe the most immediate and very wicked entanglement in those settlements, to the detriment of the entire world, which has been apportioned under those churches where the servants of Antichrist rule, possessing a spirit most opposed to Christ Jesus, in order to poison everyone with that venomous spirit. They have power over the people to teach them whatever they wish, so that no one dares

to oppose them or to test their spirit in any way, no matter how much they may lie, forcing them to drink continuously the poison of Antichrist from their mouths, without daring to call anything evil or even to think of faith in any way other than as Antichrist desires. Thus, they have subjugated the people and subjected them under these churches so that scarcely anyone can escape their spirit, raising them in their errors like hawks. In this way, Antichrist has succeeded through these parishes, and that cunningly, as if he were concerned for their salvation, ensuring that no soul goes astray, having its shepherd at home, in its own church.

CHAPTER TWENTY FOUR

Simony corrupts church offices, turning spiritual matters into material transactions

The third affliction falls upon those who wish to be priests or are already serving in churches to which a multitude of sinners are bound by the spirit of Antichrist, including the priests themselves. For priests can scarcely enter those churches through the proper door, given that the supreme Antichrist has arrogated this power to himself alone, making good works of no value unless he bestows his blessing upon them and permits them. Thus, even the priestly or pastoral ministry could not exist without his approval and confirmation. And this they call the care of souls. But this care of souls is for sale; it must be purchased from the bishop. And when it is bought, neither the bishop nor the priest truly has any care for souls. Therefore, whoever buys such an illicit spiritual office is a simoniac and falls under the curse of St. Peter, who condemned Simon when he offered money for the power of the Holy Spirit, saying to him: "Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money."¹ And here the office of spiritual ministry, which pertains to the salvation of souls, is being sold! Even the care of souls itself is up for purchase! And in some cases, this benefice or pastoral ministry is bought multiple times. For at Rome, they buy letters of authorization and permission for a church from the pope; then they buy confirmation and care of souls again from the bishop; and then from the patron, either through service, flattery, or gifts, they obtain possession of the church.

And since these matters pertain to spiritual things or are closely related to them, they should neither be bought nor sold out of greedy desire, seeking to rule against God, to live in luxury, and to enter into this role through simony, purchasing a spiritual thing with a material transaction. Furthermore, through spiritual offices, they intrude upon earthly matters, using religious ministry as a means to attain pagan dominion, power, and wealth,

1 Acts of the Apostles 8: 20.

and thereby plunge into a life of indulgence, sodomy, and impiety—sins compounded by the pretense of religious service. In this way, they take upon themselves new sins. And since this ministry concerns spiritual matters, they sin against God, entangling themselves in carnal transgressions; through the very spiritual matters instituted by God to eradicate sin, these simoniacs prepare for themselves a pathway into sin. Therefore, these sins must be greater than other sins. And the one who becomes ensnared in such sins will be an official who, in that office, ought to be eradicating sins among many. How then will he conduct that office properly to eliminate sin, when he himself, through manifold sins, has forced his way into that office? Thus, such a person falls into what the Lord Jesus says: "He who does not enter by the door into the sheepfold is a thief and a robber; and the thief comes only to steal, to kill, and to destroy."² This is the gain sought by the churches of these simoniac thieves—to destroy the people spiritually with the lying and poisonous spirit of Antichrist and to cast them into damnation.

And not only do priests sin in this way, acquiring churches through simony, but also secular lords and squires sin through simony in many ways. First and most obviously, they take large sums of money, gifts, food, or other goods in exchange for granting churches. Some lords give churches to unworthy men out of friendship, and many knights are caught in this delusion, granting churches to weak friends who would not be fit to tend swine, let alone human souls. Others grant churches in response to flattering pleas or for other unworthy reasons, by which the sin of simony is committed—even though such individuals may not take it seriously. And some wager over churches, saying: "What shall we bet, my lord, that you will not grant my son a church?" The lord replies: "I wager fifty groschen that I will." The other agrees: "Done!" Then the lord declares: "I grant your son a church; now give me my fifty groschen!" A profitable transaction indeed, which can yield great interest, as he then converts many masses and holy hours into money, pursuing his fifty groschen. Purgatory will be needed here.

Therefore, if we consider the many sins committed through these benefices, it is dangerous and dreadful for a secular person—a prince or a lord—to hold the patronage of a bishopric or parish. For if he grants it to an unworthy cleric in exchange for money, gifts, physical service, worldly favor, friendship, or flattery—woe to him for holding such patronage! It must be understood that patronage is not merely a stone church or an altar, but a power over spiritual services. Since it is a spiritual matter, it should not be bought or sold but given freely to those who are worthy, so that it may bear good fruit, as it is intended for the service

2 John 10: 1 and 10.

3 The patronage system is a social, economic, and political structure based on mutual obligations between a patron (a powerful figure) and a client (a dependent or subordinate). This system was the backbone of medieval society, influencing politics, the economy, the Church, and culture. It created networks of loyalty and dependency, but it could also lead to corruption and power struggles. In the case of the Church, wealthy individuals sponsored clergy, churches, and scholars to gain spiritual benefits (e.g., indulgences).

of saving souls. But where lords and priests have abandoned the faith, they buy and sell patronages like oxen or cows destined for slaughter, extracting worldly profit from everything. Thus, religion itself is entangled and corrupted with grave sins.

CHAPTER TWENTY FIVE

Simoniacal practices and secular power suppress true preaching of the Gospel

At first, among Christians, there were no such traps or claims of churches being under secular control. The early Christian communities had the freedom to choose their bishops or priests who were suitable for spiritual leadership. That's why back then, there was no buying and selling of church positions. But later, when the Antichrist gained great power through secular authority, the land was divided and measured for churches. Secular rulers and lords liked this because it strengthened their worldly power. They took control of church patronage so they could sell these positions at high prices, and priests began buying them from the lords or obtaining them unfairly. As a result, churches came under legal control,¹ allowing priests to buy and acquire them improperly, while lords shamelessly sold them or gave them as favors to unworthy and corrupt individuals. Since the entire land was divided up for these churches, which are ruled by corrupt lords and priests, there is no room left for true priests to preach the gospel honestly. The lords and corrupt priests have united in the spirit of the Antichrist against Christ. They flatter and support each other, strengthening themselves as enemies of Christ. Having taken control of these sacred places, to which the whole land has been assigned, they prevent the truth of Christ from being preached. Because of this, Christ could no longer send his apostles to "preach the gospel to all creation."² The two powers—secular and clerical—have taken control of every corner of the land for their churches and kingdoms, working together in the spirit of the Antichrist. They do not allow the gospel to be preached against the corruption that the Antichrist has used to lull the world into complacency. That is why now the Antichrist's apostles peacefully sing the gospel in Latin, and the world does not object. The gospel has been turned into sweet songs with high voices and religious melodies, accompanied by incense, bright candles, and ringing bells. In this way, they have prepared the gospel for the world like a sweet sauce—so that when people hear it in a foreign language with pleasant music, they do not feel sorrow or anger. It does not cause them

¹ i.e. patronage became a legal institution.

² cf. Mark 16: 15.

any pain, as it is just a song to them. But when the true apostles preached the gospel, they spoke against the world and condemned its sins. For that, the world killed them. Today, the Antichrist does more for the gospel than the apostles ever did—he honors it with incense and many candles when it is sung in Latin, and offerings are made during the service. But when the gospel is preached in Czech against his pride, he rewards it with a stinking prison full of filth.

These things are well known. So let us only look at how faith has fallen into a trap. Everything, both worldly and spiritual, has been manipulated to oppress faith so much that it can neither breathe nor find a place. Therefore, if someone truly has faith, he must feel tormented by these wicked people. They falsely claim to follow faith, praising it with their mouths but knowing nothing about it. They cannot even sense its true essence. But when faith reveals itself in someone's truthful words, they despise it and accuse it of heresy. That is why these are the most deceitful people, the most removed from the spirit of Jesus, and the most ready to crucify Christ again, emptying the power of His cross and treating it as a mockery.

CHAPTER TWENTY SIX

Secular lords sell souls to Antichrist, betraying Christ's sacrifice for profit

But there is still something important to say about how secular lords sell church patronage to the apostles of the Antichrist. They commit serious sins by selling or giving churches in such a corrupt way in exchange for earthly possessions, bringing upon themselves the great sin of simony. Secondly, they sell or give churches to enemies of Christ's cross, sometimes even for free, to wicked men. What are they giving away? A church—not just its bare walls, but the entire congregation that has been assigned to it by law. And when an evil priest takes control of a church, he also gains power over all the people legally bound to it. What are these people? They are God's creation, made for His glory. They were bought by Christ, at the cost of His suffering. Yet, to whom has the lord sold these people, whom Christ purchased with His blood? The lord has sold them to the apostle of the Antichrist, Christ's greatest enemy, so that whatever Christ intended for these people, the Antichrist's messenger can now destroy. Christ paid for them with His blood and painful death to give them life. But the apostle of the Antichrist bought them from the pope, from the bishop, and from the lord—not to give them life, but to ruin their souls for his own pleasure. For the one who has bought these people in such a wicked way has not entered through the proper doors but has snuck in another way, outside of

the door. Therefore, he is a thief and a robber ¹, and his purpose is only to steal, kill, and destroy. He holds in his hands nothing but death and damnation. His work directly opposes Christ's, as Christ labored to bring life to people through His suffering, while the Antichrist's messenger seeks to bring death—to kill and destroy. Thus, Christ buys, and the lord sells. What Christ buys, the lord sells. Why does Christ buy? To bring life and salvation. Why does the lord sell? To bring death and damnation. This is a truly terrifying and hidden evil, as if it did not even exist. It is an unspeakably great offense—to act directly against God. No other sin is so deeply opposed to Christ's suffering. Other sins may crucify Christ within a person's own soul, but this act of selling people into the hands of Christ's enemy kills the life that Christ won for them through His death. And if someone did not yet have that life, this trade ensures that they never will. For this enemy has blocked the path of God's grace to these people, filling them with the poison of the Antichrist's spirit. Thus, his rightful task is to steal, destroy others, and lead them all to damnation. Sir! Remember that you sold a church into the hands of the Antichrist's messenger, giving him power over the people Christ bought with His blood. By this corrupt deal, you gave him authority over these people, so that he could strip them away from God and prevent Christ's suffering from having any effect on them. So go ahead, boast about your church patronage! Tell everyone how your estate is worth a hundred groschen more because of it! But if you are confronted about it and get angry, shouting, "Ha! I will give the parish to a monk or even to the devil himself!"—do not be so quick to rage. The consequences waiting for you are far worse than you can imagine. When they arrive, you will wish you had been the patron of a filthy outhouse rather than bear the punishment you have earned for selling the church and mocking Christ's suffering by handing its people over to Christ's enemy.

This is a terrifying thought—the complete blindness of Christians, priests, and lords alike, who trade in human souls without any fear. Christ bought these people for the highest price—His own blood! Yet the lord buys them again, and the buyer shows them no mercy, treating them like cattle, yoking them to whatever burden he chooses. Then comes the third buyer—the parish priest. He buys the people from the pope, and the pope sells them

1 cf. John 10: 1.

into the hands of someone he does not even know, whether he is a man or a devil in disguise. The pope does not know the people, nor the man to whom he sells them—he only wants to take gold from the wolf, allowing him to prey upon the people. The same thing happens with bishops, who sell them at home. And even these two corrupt deals are not enough—the priest must then go find a third deal with the patron lord. Thus, the lord sells the people Christ bought, selling them a third time to the priest so that he too can exploit them, holding power over them just like the lord. He can throw them in prison for unpaid dues, sue them for debts, or excommunicate them. And what do these three men—the secular lord, the bishop, and the priest—ultimately do? They trade in human lives as if they were cattle or oxen, forcing them to work and milking them for wealth. These two rulers, both secular and religious, have only one goal: to enslave the people under unbearable burdens so that they groan under their weight. But when the final buyer comes, the one who truly owns these people, and asks how they dared to buy and sell His people without consulting Him, how they corrupted His purchase and turned it into a profit for the devil—oh, how they will wish they could cry out to the mountains, "Bury us, so we do not have to face this dreadful judge!" Yet for now, all of this seems like a joke, like some foolish myth.

CHAPTER TWENTY SEVEN

Simoniacal clergy, corrupt rituals, and Antichrist deceive and harm souls

Just as the leadership of priests and their appointment to office are described here as being full of faults, their work and its results are just as barren and shameful. It is like a tree eaten away by worms—without praise or benefit, bringing only suffering, misery, and sorrow. Their work is corrupted and leads only to death. When we talk about true goodness and actions that earn merit, according to God's word, we must have a good root. That is why He says: "I am the true vine, and you are the branches."¹ A branch cannot bear good fruit by itself unless it stays connected to the root. If it does not draw strength from the root, it will wither. The same applies to all of us—if we are not connected to Him through living faith and love, we do not have the life of grace within us and cannot do anything good without Him. That is why those who stand against God, under the power of the devil, bear the fruits of death. Even though they might appear outwardly religious and seem holy, they live wicked lives and buy their positions in disgrace, dishonoring Jesus.

¹ John 15: 5.

They continue this corrupt business and feed their worldly desires with it. That is why the apostle of Christ describes them as "autumn trees without fruit, twice dead, uprooted, wild waves of the sea, foaming up their shame." ² Since they are spiritually dead, without God's grace, they cannot perform works pleasing to God. Instead, they spread the poison of the Antichrist into the world, bringing spiritual death to people. Their religious services are nothing more than dead traditions, following the rules of their master, the Antichrist. They perform them with meaningless chants and loud cries in churches. Ordinary people do not pray as disgracefully as they do. They walk around with large books, making strange noises—"fam frr, fam frr"—ordering their servants to fast, wandering around villages, and performing ridiculous, empty rituals, like a foolish carnival. And even these foolish things, they would not know how to do if they had not been written down for them. Yet, these people are supposed to be guiding others. But how can they lead anyone anywhere but where they are already going themselves? They claim their prayers can even help souls escape from hell, but all of this is nothing more than the work of the Antichrist, falsely presented as holiness.

Everything they do in their priesthood has a price. They sell masses, vigils, psalms, weddings, baptisms, confessions, anointing, funerals, and even the ringing of church bells. They do not give anything freely because they themselves have received nothing freely from their father, the Antichrist. Do not expect mercy from a priest for free—this has been sung about in Bohemia for ages. First, they acquire wealth—lands, payments, tithes, and profits—in the name of serving God. Then, on top of that, they charge people again for everything.

Their entire religious service is stained with corruption and heresy. According to scholars, popes, and church councils, this is considered one of the greatest heresies among Christians. Some scholars even say that simony (selling church offices and services) is a heresy that invalidates the priesthood itself—that is, those who commit it lose their priestly authority. These things are extremely serious among Christians and clearly show that the Antichrist, the greatest enemy of Christ, rules over them through his works. Many Christians, deceived and blind, believe they are seeking Christ—not in truth and certainty, but in a deceptive illusion. They may think they are searching for Him, but they will not find Him. Certainly, they will not find Him among the Antichrist and his followers, who work to erase Christ while presenting themselves as the source of salvation for the blind. They use Christ as a disguise while making themselves the real focus of worship.

2 Judas 12-13.

Because of this, Christ can only reach the people in the way that the Antichrist allows. And the Antichrist always presents Christ in a way that makes himself look good to the people, so that through Christ, he can gain control over them. That is why the Antichrist's hostility toward Christ is not easy to recognize. Outwardly, he appears friendly—just as Judas did when he kissed Jesus while secretly betraying Him. The Antichrist acts the same way: with great displays of piety, bowing, ceremonies, blessings, and outward signs of holiness. He loudly exalts the name of Christ, kneeling, bowing his head, and showing all kinds of reverence, while secretly working to remove Jesus Christ from people's hearts. He works to erase the truth of the Gospel and Christ's humble, hardworking, and poor way of life, ensuring that it is never preached or practiced. The hidden nature of the Antichrist's opposition to Christ is particularly dangerous because he disguises himself in Christ's service and honor. This opposition is carried out mainly through the Antichrist's church leaders, who have divided up the land, assigned churches to their followers, and spread the poison of the Antichrist across the world to lead many people astray.

CHAPTER TWENTY EIGHT

Antichrist deceives, usurps Christ's power, and falsely grants forgiveness

I will now describe some things that have happened long ago and have been accepted by the world. These things have entangled the world, keeping it trapped in blindness and errors, led by the "man of sin," who has spread sin across the earth in many forms. This matter deserves careful thought, especially where it openly opposes Christ under the disguise of false holiness. The one called Antichrist has earned his name because he opposes Christ, trying to destroy or remove Him so that he himself can take Christ's place. He hides his deception in hypocrisy, making people believe that what he does is in service of Christ and for His honor. Yet, many can see his hostility in how he burns, beheads, imprisons, and kills Christ's followers. His wicked and corrupt life—full of adultery and crime—stands in direct opposition to Christ and condemns the Gospel. He also resists Christ by claiming divine power for himself. For example, he declares that people cannot do good deeds unless he permits, blesses, or grants power for them.

Otherwise, even if God commands those good deeds, they supposedly do not count for salvation if Antichrist forbids them. He also prevents people from preaching Christ's Gospel and drinking Christ's blood from the chalice, though Christ Himself commands it. Since Antichrist opposes Christ's orders, he claims these actions have no saving power. According to him, sacraments are invalid unless he consecrates them. He forbids baptisms, masses, confessions, and even burials unless he approves. Yet, such power belongs to God alone. It is not right for anyone to use power in a way that overturns good things. Since God commands good, how could He also grant power to go against His own orders? That would mean He contradicts Himself, which is impossible. Furthermore, God does not force people to stop doing evil against their will—He lets them choose freely. Though He commands them not to sin, He does not compel them, leaving them to abandon sin of their own free will. Since God, in His highest authority, does not force goodness upon people, it is arrogant and reckless for Antichrist to exalt himself above God and oppose good deeds so openly. First, Antichrist despises good works, especially the preaching of truth that exposes his sinful life. He calls this heresy and tries to suppress it so that his wickedness is not revealed. Second, he wants all good to happen only by his permission. He seeks to disgrace any good deed done without his approval, treating as cursed whatever he does not bless. He leads people away from God and Jesus Christ, making them follow him instead, valuing only the good that he defines and performs in the way he dictates. Because he is Christ's enemy, he does not guide people toward Christ's true goodness but toward a false, deceptive goodness that contradicts Christ. He presents himself as the ultimate source of goodness, like an overflowing fountain that can never run dry.

By doing this, he removes Jesus Christ from people's hearts, leaving only His name in songs and words while stripping Him of His power—like grapes pressed until empty, leaving only useless skins behind. Meanwhile, Antichrist keeps all authority over goodness in his own hands, claiming that only what he blesses is holy.

Thus, only priests under his rule have the power to serve, and only those who share his spirit are accepted. He rejects those who wish to offer the chalice or preach the Gospel against him, blocking the way for truth to be spoken against his corruption. He ordains only high priests, who then ordain those below them, granting them the authority to perform sacraments and forgive some or all sins. By this power, he consecrates churches, altars, cemeteries, vestments, chalices, and other items used in worship. He also blesses food, meat, eggs, cheese, Easter bread, lambs, bacon, candles, ashes, fire, oats, and water. Whatever he chooses to bless is made holy, and whatever he curses is condemned to hell. Whatever he exalts from the grave and declares as a saint remains sainted. He establishes holidays and commands them to be observed. Thus, salvation and damnation seem to come from his hands, as if he has completely taken Christ's place in granting holiness and salvation—yet he does so falsely, in opposition to Christ. To Christ's dishonor, he has ordained an enormous number of corrupt priests across many lands, giving them power over the people in apostolic offices. Through them, he spreads his spirit of opposition to Christ throughout the world. By ordaining such corrupt clergy, he tramples upon Jesus Christ and poisons the people, making them believe that holiness can only come from him—even as they remain defiled through him. These are the main ways in which Antichrist opposes Christ. He has rejected Jesus Christ's true power—the only power that can bring salvation—and replaced it with his own false power, making himself appear as the people's savior.

Above all, his greatest evil is claiming the power to forgive all sins and free people from punishment—allowing them to be pardoned without repentance or suffering for their sins. He grants forgiveness even to those whom God does not forgive. For God does not forgive anyone unless they truly repent, fully abandon sin in their will, intent, and actions, and remain in that repentance until death without mortal sin. Only such a person will receive God's forgiveness. Yet, Antichrist offers forgiveness to those who do not repent. This is proven by the fact that he sells indulgences for gold, granting forgiveness to people who have never truly repented, who do not even understand what true repentance is, and who do not even recognize their sins.

To recognize sin, one must know God's law—because breaking any of His commandments is a mortal sin. But since many people do not even know God's commandments, they live in ever-increasing sin without realizing it, and therefore, they cannot truly repent. Even so, Antichrist gives full forgiveness and exemption from punishment to these sinful and blind people—those whom God Himself does not forgive.

Secondly, the Antichrist wrongfully claims the power to forgive sins, even though only God has the right to do so. God Himself says, "I alone forgive and erase human sins."¹ So, when the Antichrist forgives sins without requiring repentance, he deceives people and blasphemes against God. He takes for himself what belongs only to God and His Son, Jesus Christ. Only Jesus has the right to forgive sins, but only for those who truly repent. He died for the sins of humanity; He is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world. He knows people's hearts and decides whom to forgive. The Antichrist, however, pretends to offer forgiveness and God's grace to anyone, as if he has the power to grant it however and to whomever he pleases. But he does not have this authority, nor can he truly understand a person's soul—whether they deserve greater or lesser mercy, partial or complete forgiveness. Since he cannot see into people's hearts, as only God can, he has no real ability to give divine grace or true forgiveness, even though he claims to. Therefore, the true faith must remain in Christ, the great High Priest of the good things to come. Through the Holy Spirit, He offered Himself as a perfect sacrifice to God, cleansing our consciences from dead works so we may serve the living God. Since Jesus is both fully God and fully human, He alone has the authority and power to forgive sins and grant grace. He sees into all hearts and rewards each person according to their faith and love. Those who love Him more and humble themselves before Him receive greater forgiveness, just as He said: "Her many sins are forgiven because she loved much."² Likewise, those who patiently endure hardships without complaining and do not return evil for evil have many of their sins forgiven. Those who continuously improve their lives, sincerely regret their sins day by day, and strive to live better will receive the greatest forgiveness from Jesus, the true High Priest. He alone has the power to grant forgiveness according to the worthiness He sees in each person.

1 Isaiah 43: 25.

2 Luke 7: 47.

CHAPTER TWENTY NINE

Antichrist usurps Christ's power, offering false forgiveness and salvation

So, in these matters, the very foundation of faith is at stake, touching on the most important things—namely, the cleansing of sins for those seeking grace and forgiveness. This forgiveness, which comes through faith in Jesus Christ, is now being proclaimed against his enemy, the Antichrist. The Antichrist has unjustly oppressed Christ in this matter, falsely claiming this power for himself and convincing the world that people must travel in large crowds to Rome to seek forgiveness of all sins from him. Throughout the lands, he declares "holy years" for such forgiveness, promising freedom from all sins and suffering. He even sells letters of indulgence for gold coins, granting people the right to sin freely for several years. Later, any random priest can supposedly absolve those sins using the pope's authority, as if the person had bought a license to sin. Through these indulgences, spread across the land, the Antichrist has erased Jesus Christ from people's minds. They no longer understand how Christ himself forgives sins, because they have the Antichrist right in front of them, offering easy pardons. His agents, like apostles, use these indulgences to make money, just as Simon the Sorcerer deceived the people of Samaria with his magic.¹ In this way, the Antichrist most clearly casts out Christ by offering a form of forgiveness that allows the world to continue in sin. His version of forgiveness is completely opposed to Christ's. For when the Antichrist takes over Christ's rightful authority to forgive sins, people no longer feel any reason to turn to Christ at all. If forgiveness comes from the Antichrist, then everything else is easier as well. There is no lack, for he has forcefully removed Jesus Christ from his rightful place and stolen his power. With this stolen authority, the Antichrist can then claim all other rights belonging to Christ. Just as he supposedly forgives all sins and removes all suffering, he now presents himself as the one who brings full salvation to the whole world. He claims to purify everything, make all things just and holy, spread countless blessings, and establish religious orders that supposedly honor God. In reality, these orders only lead people to praise God with a spirit full of death and hostility toward Jesus Christ. Through this kind of false worship, Jesus Christ is pushed into oblivion as if he were dead. This deception destroys people's spiritual life of grace and faith. In this way, the Antichrist deserves his name under the title of Christ more than any foreign pagan or enemy of the faith. No tyrant, no matter how much Christian blood he spills or how openly he insults Christ—whether by wiping out all physical Christians, corrupting Christian teachings, or burning the books of God's law—can match the deception of the Antichrist.

¹ cf. Acts of the Apostles 8: 9 ff.

For if such a person acted this way, he might physically wipe out all living Christians. But even if he killed them for their faith, he could not destroy their souls. That would indeed make him an enemy of Christ, a great Antichrist. However, even such a persecutor would not reach the level of opposition to Christ as one who, under Christ's name and under the appearance of a holy apostolic ministry — established for salvation — leads people away from faith, turns them against Christ, and brings Jesus Christ into death, causing the destruction of souls. In this way, people would no longer even need the devil for their damnation — only Christ himself, twisted and corrupted by the spirit of the Antichrist. The Antichrist offers this distorted version of Christ to the people, allowing him to enter into them in the most deadly way. Through his deceptions, he establishes a false Christ among them—one who is completely opposed to the true Christ.

CHAPTER THIRTY

Antichrist deceives people with false graces, leading them away from Christ

Talking about the unsettling hostility of the Antichrist towards the people who have drunk his spirit and rushed into unknown death through him is meaningless. It is also not surprising that the Antichrist, under a false cover of holiness, suppresses Christ in them. Even if he openly and strongly opposes Christ, the people who are intoxicated by his spirit remain asleep, trapped in deep darkness. The Antichrist leads them down the path of death, promising them life, but they are too blind in the darkness to see the truth.

But first, it must be said that he carries out his opposition to Christ through his apostles. Through them, he has taken over the whole land and divided it among churches, so they can spread his poison among nations, enslaving them with power. These apostles of his pour out various deadly poisons of the Antichrist upon humankind, for they possess a great supply of them under his authority, as has already been stated.

Moreover, they invoke all the saints in heaven—apostles, martyrs, holy virgins, angels, and even the mother of Jesus—to spread the Antichrist's deadly poison across the world that has turned away from Christ. They deceive foolish people by falsely claiming to bring the goodness and grace of the saints to them. These people love lies that sound pleasant, just as a drunken man enjoys music while drinking wine. They want nothing to do with the true saints—they do not want to abandon their sins, repent, leave the sinful world, endure injustice, suffer martyrdom, or take on any of the holiness of the saints.

Instead, they prefer to bear the sins of all devils upon themselves and stand among their ranks. Thus, the Antichrist's apostles, whether church leaders or monks, comfort such people with talk of the heavenly saints. They tell them about the saints' merits and great kindness, especially their love and care for sinners. They claim that the saints pray intensely to God for them, and that because of this, they can help people in their suffering. Some saints are said to control fire, others water, shame, poverty, sudden death, fever, epilepsy, imprisonment, chains, teeth, eyes, wolves, snakes, or pigs. They are believed to have power over all harmful things that cause people trouble. That is why people serve them, fast in their honor, burn candles for them, make offerings, pay for Masses, celebrate their feast days, and pray to them devoutly. In return, they believe the saints will protect them from these troubles. For example, if someone has a toothache, they believe that Saint Apollonia can relieve it—because her father knocked out her teeth for the name of Jesus, and thus she was given authority over tooth pain.

And so, they divided responsibilities among themselves to make sure that people do not suffer from the troubles that God justly allows because of their sins—this is what the saints supposedly fix. God punishes, and the saints heal, making them opposed to God. God allows worldly shame, epilepsy, blindness, and poverty as consequences of sin. But the saints supposedly intervene so that their followers do not have to suffer these things. Spreading such beliefs about the saints among sinful people—who neither obey nor honor God—could only have come from the spirit of the Antichrist, working through his church apostles scattered across the land. Out of greed, they elevate the saints with many lies, falsely attributing holiness to them before a foolish people. Their goal is to rob people in churches, taking both their wealth and their souls. Without so many saints in heaven, these apostles would find it harder to deceive the people. By offering the supposed holiness of the saints, they gain access to people's money, using this deception to increase and justify their greed under the disguise of holiness. Through this, they spread idolatry among ignorant people, who, in all things, steal honor from God—giving divine worship to created beings instead of the Creator. They seek from creation what they should, by faith, seek from the Creator.

Not only does the blind Antichrist spread this idolatry, but he also reeks of beer and is ready to drink away both God and the saints, indulging in drunkenness as if they were nothing more than a salty herring. But he is not the only one leading people astray—so do those who appear wiser or who claim

to want to honor God in the most correct way. These so-called wise ones work hardest to justify blasphemy against God and defend idolatry in the most intellectual way possible. They use Scripture and theological authorities to support their claims. They exalt the saints with cleverly disguised lies, emphasizing their supposed great mercy toward sinners. They argue: "Since, when they were alive, they cared deeply about human salvation — despite the burden of their physical bodies — now that they are free from their bodies and with Christ, their grace and power must be even greater. Now they have immense favor with God, and He refuses them nothing. Whatever they ask for sinners will be immediately granted. And even more so with the mother of Jesus — she surpasses all saints and even the ranks of angels in honor and glory. Her beloved Son will never refuse her anything she asks for." They go even further, claiming that her love for sinners is so great that she descends into hell itself, arguing with demons over lost souls and rescuing them from the devil's grasp. That is why, they say, she is called 'Hail Mary, full of grace.' And if her mercy toward sinners continues in this way, saving them from the devil and from eternal damnation, then no one will remain in hell — she will deliver them all.

Therefore, when the teachers and other messengers of the Antichrist speak about the saints—their supposed great mercy and miraculous help—confirming it all with lies, faith itself must stand in judgment. They cannot truly control heaven and hell as they claim, nor create new laws from both through deception. Faith, which is founded on God's words, will always reveal these false laws as nothing but poison in the world. So, go ahead—pile up the greatest mercies upon the saints, claim that they work tirelessly for the salvation of sinners or bring prosperity in this life, and even exalt Christ's mother above God in her mercy toward sinners. Yet faith will always rise against these claims and expose all these seductive lies!

Therefore, let us compare the abundant mercies that people attribute to the saints with the faith of the Holy Gospel. The Gospel shows that the greatest mercy is given to all who seek grace in truth and are worthy to receive God's mercy. The Gospel says that the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.¹ The Gospel also teaches that all of God's mercies have been obtained and given to the saints through Jesus Christ because he won every grace for all people through his death. That is why the holy apostles, along with all the saints, acknowledge that whatever mercy and gifts they had, they received them all from Christ's fullness.² And since the saints have received everything from his fullness, this applies not only to those already in heaven but also to those who will one day enter heaven — they, too, will receive from his fullness.

1 John 1: 17.

2 John 1: 16.

All who are to enter heaven must be holy and must be members of Christ, the head of the body. They must receive all their spiritual life and strength from him. For anyone who will be in heaven must be holy. Christ is the root, full of all grace and the sweetness of divine comfort, and all the saints in heaven are branches. By remaining connected to this root, they draw all their spiritual strength from him, bearing abundant fruit of righteousness. If someone does not draw grace from the fullness of this root, they are like a dry branch, prepared for the fire. And if they could not receive life while standing on the root, from whom will they receive it once they are dead? Even if the saints were to pour a full sack of grace upon them, they would not come back to life. If a branch, while attached to the vine, cannot take in life-giving grace, how could it possibly find life elsewhere, apart from this vine? The Savior himself said: "Any branch in me that does not bear fruit will dry up, be thrown into the fire, and burn."³ Therefore, if someone could not receive life from the root, not even the greatest mercies from the saints could give them life by any other means. And if someone has already come to the fountain of living water to drink from its fullness so they will never thirst again, what good will a single drop of dew on the grass do for them? Thus, the saints cannot replace Christ, who is the fountain full of living water. That is why Saint James, speaking about God's grace, says: "Every good and perfect gift comes from above, from the Father of lights."⁴ With these words, Saint James affirms that all the perfect gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit—everything needed for eternal life—come from above, from the Father of lights, through the merits of Jesus Christ. These gifts are given to those who remain in him with living faith and love, as in their true root, receiving all fullness from him. Saint Paul firmly established believers in this truth, urging them not to seek grace or salvation anywhere else. He told them: "For in Christ you have all fullness and abundance of grace, for in him dwells the fullness of the Godhead bodily."⁵ The fountain of living water is full. If someone thirsts, let them not wander about searching for dew on the grass, but let them drink from the full fountain.⁶

The debate about great graces is this: Some say that since the saints, having left their earthly bodies, have now received great mercy, they can abundantly distribute it to sinners—especially Christ's mother, of whom it is said that she is full of grace. No matter how much people wish to exalt the saints or the Virgin Mary in their mercy, all those graces still do not compare to the greatest grace of all, of which the Savior said: "Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends."

3 John 15:6.

4 James 1:17.

5 Colossians 2:9.

6 cf. John 7:37.

"You are my friends if you do what I command you." ⁷ Look, here it is clearly stated who has the greatest love and who can reach the farthest with it: the one who created humanity. He, being God, chose to become human for the sake of humanity. He gave up his life in a cruel death for sinful people to free them from eternal damnation, cleanse them from their sins with his own blood, reconcile them with God, obtain God's grace for them, and secure their eternal life.

Because of this, he himself says that no one has greater love than this—no one else can do so much good out of love or be as truly beneficial as the Son of God. No one in heaven or on earth could possess such grace or power—not the apostles, not the mother of Christ, not even all the angels of heaven—only the Son of God himself. Therefore, when people exalt the saints and their supposed great mercies, they overlook this truth. They deceive sinners by drawing them toward the grace of the saints while leading them away from the greatest grace of all—the grace of the Son of God.

⁷ John 15: 13-14.

CHAPTER THIRTY ONE

God's grace requires rejecting sin and is only found in Christ

But here it is necessary to finish explaining these divine graces—where they can go, who can receive them, and to whom the Son of God gives them. Saint Paul explains where God's greatest graces remain, saying: "The grace of God, our Savior, has appeared to all people, teaching us to renounce all wickedness and worldly desires so that we may live justly in this world." ¹ This shows why God's greatest grace teaches these things. It is because grace cannot be received or take root in anyone who does not first learn from it and prepare a place for it by rejecting what is opposed to it—namely, all wickedness and sinful desires. Grace and sin cannot exist together in the same soul. Scripture says: "The bed is too narrow for two to lie on it; the blanket is too short to cover them both." ² So, this means that God's grace has come into the world, wanting to be given to people, but only under the right conditions. And those conditions are that whoever wants to truly benefit from God's grace must first let go of sinful attachments to the world and the flesh. This is because God's grace cannot exist in the same

¹ Titus 11: 12.

² Isaiah 28: 20.

soul alongside any evil or fleshly love, but wants to have its place in man alone.

Therefore, the grace of our God has come to teach us this lesson. And if we learn from it this lesson—namely, that by expelling from our will all love for iniquity, we make room for it alone—it will remain with us for all salvific benefits and advantages. But if someone despises that grace and its teaching, unwilling to submit to its instruction because of their iniquity, and instead turns to heaven seeking grace elsewhere, how will they fare? For all the citizens of heaven will cry out to him, saying that the Lord of heaven has descended to earth with all the graces that people need, and calling all to those graces, He says: "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink freely."³ Therefore, He is the path to all grace, the path to future reward, and no one will enter heaven except through Him, nor will they find any grace of God anywhere else but in Him and through Him.

3 John 7: 37.

CHAPTER THIRTY TWO

False teachers mislead by elevating Mary and saints over Christ's grace

So, priests and teachers act unjustly against the truth of Christ when they lead people elsewhere, making the saints in heaven seem sweet and full of great grace—especially the mother of Jesus—though they cannot truthfully say about her what they can about Jesus: that she is the way and the life.¹ Yes, she gave birth to the one who is the way and the life, but she herself is not Christ, nor did she redeem the world with her blood to save it from damnation. That power belongs only to someone who is both true God and true man—only such a person could reconcile people to God through his own blood. Since Mary is not both God and man, she could not reconcile people to God with her blood. But the Son of God took true human flesh from her, and in that flesh, he reconciled humanity with God. In this, she contributed more to human salvation than any other saint because her body provided Christ with the flesh needed to redeem the world. For this, she deserves greater praise than all the other saints. However, she does not have the power to grant salvation as the Son of God does.

It is therefore wrong to claim divine grace exists where it does not and to ignore where it truly is—in Jesus Christ. It is misleading to promise great grace through the saints to sinners who do not believe in Christ, who do not obey him, and who do not follow his commandments. Such people remain in sin and blindness and are unworthy of God's grace.

1 cf. John 14: 6.

So the Judases, betraying all the people concerning their salvation, have set up the mother of Christ as though on the walls of a besieged city,² making her a tool to tell the people endless lies about her mercy for sinners—though they do not even know its true measure, nor could they even proclaim so much in Christ Jesus. They have made her into something like a cow's udder for sinners to drink from, claiming that her grace is limitless and endlessly abundant. But these false teachers are so faithless that if their claims were true, Christ himself, with all his grace, would be useless. And when people believe more in the grace of Mary and the saints than in the grace found in Christ, Christ becomes useless to them. But according to true faith, Christ is complete in himself and gives his fullness to all who believe. Just as no one can deny Christ, no one can deny the grace placed in him for the salvation of believers. If someone does not take grace from Christ as he gives it, they will find it nowhere else—not in heaven, nor in hell. For anyone who is not blessed through Christ is cursed by all creation. God will arm all of creation as a weapon against them, so that wherever they go, they will find nothing but their own curse. For whoever has the Son also has the Father. Without God and without his Son, Jesus Christ, what does a person have? Absolutely nothing. Neither in heaven nor on earth—only a curse and the waiting fires of hell. That is why Antichrist and his apostles, the enemies of Christ, offer the world false grace from heaven, making up many lies to lull the world into spiritual sleep, keeping people from true grace in Christ. The devil leads these false apostles of Antichrist to comfort sinners with promises of grace that do not exist and will never come to them. At the same time, they hide and bury the true grace that is in Christ—just as if they were burying a dead man—so that no one can understand or know about it. For it is the nature of Antichrist to pour out his poisonous, false grace over the world, offering it as if it comes from heaven, so that people do not realize he has buried Christ and his grace in forgetfulness.

2 Just as a city under siege might place someone on its walls to act in defense, they have placed Mary in a position of power and authority she does not actually have. In other words, Chelčický is accusing them of using Mary as a defensive weapon—putting her in the front line of their teaching—while attributing to her a role or power in salvation that rightly belongs only to Christ.

CHAPTER THIRTY THREE

Idolatry replaces true faith by seeking saints' help over God's

Many people talk and focus a lot on the saints. But who could possibly respond to everything that is said about them, based on the stories spread by the messengers of the Antichrist? These messengers have created a strict law about the saints, built on false assumptions, making it seem as if the salvation of humanity depends on them just as much as on Christ Himself. They keep people busy honoring the saints—celebrating their feast days, fasting for them, offering sacrifices, and praying to them. They claim that the saints care for sinners, intercede for them before God, and now have even more grace to help sinners than they did when they were alive. People are told to pray to them so that their prayers may be passed on to God. Some take a slightly lighter view, saying that at the very least, the saints wish us well before God. But who could ever list all the false assumptions spread about them—beliefs that do not come from faith in Christ? Instead, many of these ideas are sinful and lead people astray, causing them to fall into confusion and error. People believe that these falsehoods, glorified in the name of the saints, are actually the truth. Furthermore, the honors given to saints include practices that belong only to God, such as prayer, fasting, offerings, celebrating feast days, lighting candles, holding Masses, kneeling, and other acts of devotion performed with the body or spirit. These acts of worship should be directed only to the Creator. Every law commands that people should kneel, bow, and humble themselves before God alone as an act of worship to Him. Redirecting these acts to a created being is idolatry. The Jews, for example, never dedicated holy days to any created being, nor did they light candles or fast for anyone except God. Even today, they follow this commandment. And when they did offer such worship to idols, God punished them for it. So just as Christians are required to give full honor and worship to the Creator, many of them have instead increased their idolatry by transferring these honors to created beings—even to the saints in heaven. But as the prophet Isaiah says, God will not share His glory and praise with anyone in heaven or on earth.¹ A wise person can offend God's majesty more by worshiping a worthy creature than by worshiping something lowly and despised. This is because a despised thing is unworthy and does not bring spiritual benefit, while a glorious being is seen as worthy and is believed to bring salvation and grace. That is why people are easily drawn to loving and honoring the saints,

1 Isaiah 42:8.

so much so that they transfer to them all the honor that belongs to the Creator alone. Sinners who fear God's judgment for their sins—who are afraid that He might send them to hell and therefore cannot place their hope in Him—find great hope in the saints. They seek mercy, help, and intercession from them, just as they would from an earthly king. They turn their worship completely toward these saints, believing they can calm God's anger against them. Priests today do not even realize what they are teaching or how they have led the people astray. They act as if the holiness of past saints is still stored up for them to use. Whatever they preach, they claim to be drawing from the "full barrels" of the saints' holiness, relying on their sanctity rather than true faith in God. When people seek from the saints what they should be seeking from God alone, they are in fact choosing other gods for themselves. They have been deceived by the false promises of the apostles of the Antichrist—men who rob people both physically and spiritually. These false teachers promise all kinds of blessings through the saints, not only intercession before God but also as if they were influential advisors to a terrifying king whose wrath they can barely calm. They spread many stories about the saints' help, claiming that for every kind of suffering, there is a saint who has power over that misfortune and can rescue those who serve him. This is all done in a way that benefits the priests, filling their purses and feeding their bellies. The priest always says: "You have given to the saint what I have eaten." And the foolish people, though they see the priest feasting, still believe they are serving the saint.

But in all of this, what is really happening? People who should be seeking help from God alone instead choose other gods and turn away from Him! And yet, they believe that by doing this, they are actually seeking the salvation of their souls. They feel more comfort in serving the saints than in trusting God. They have been poisoned by this false teaching, spread by so-called wise teachers and the apostles of the Antichrist. These false teachers do nothing but deceive sinners, using borrowed holiness to trick them. The people deserve God's wrath, yet they are constantly given excuses to believe in these things, especially in matters that have nothing to do with real faith. With all these excessive and misguided teachings—teachings so deep in error that no one can find the bottom—what can be done? The only solution is for people to cling to true faith, despite all the misleading doctrines. In the end, faith may be the only thing left for believers, and those who cannot endure suffering for their faith will be lost along with the unbelievers.

Looking back at everything we have discussed, we see that people seek out the saints in order to escape physical suffering. They have been told that the saints control misfortunes like poverty, public shame, epilepsy, imprisonment, and other troubles common to humanity

Because of this, many superstitions have arisen, but they must be rejected in light of God's words: "Offer to the Lord a sacrifice of praise, fulfill your vows to the Most High, and call upon Me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver you."² This is what true faith teaches about all suffering that can happen to a person. God commands us to turn to Him in our struggles, praying to Him so that He may, according to His will, bring good out of those hardships and deliver us from them. Especially when it comes to suffering that tempts people to sin or sets dangerous traps for them, a wise person should seek help from God alone. A faithful person, obeying God's command, will trust in faith through all troubles and ignore false superstitions, standing firm like someone sheltered from a hailstorm. But if a person abandons God's command and turns to superstition, they are like a boat without oars, helpless in the storm and doomed to destruction. As we can see, those who seek help from the saints in their suffering are never free from falling into sin. Not only do they seek the saints in their troubles in a misguided way, but they also turn to fortune tellers and sorcerers, believing in them just as much. One day, they run to the Virgin Mary in Kyjov, the next day to a sorcerer in Temelín, and later to St. Procopius in Týn, as if he were an enchanter—seeking help from anyone who can ease their suffering, whether it be God or the devil. Because they lack true faith, they are driven by superstition like a leaf blown by the wind, with no guiding law to keep them steady.

2 Psalms 50, 14 and 15.

CHAPTER THIRTY FOUR

Praying to saints replaces trust in God, leading to idolatry

One of the biggest debates about saints is whether we should pray to them for help and intercession, even though there is no certainty about their role in this. In all of this, we must hold on to faith in God, because prayer—especially when it involves salvation, spiritual growth, or any kind of guidance—should be directed only to the Creator, not to any created being. However, when it comes to everyday earthly matters—such as borrowing tools, food, clothing, or money—people help each other out of love, fulfilling

God's commandment. But praying to the saints in heaven is not like asking a neighbour at the market for a sack of grain; it concerns matters higher than anything earthly, things that people do not have in their power but God alone, matters that concern the salvation of souls. And since those things lie entirely in the power of God Himself, to pray to the saints for them presupposes, from the start, an impure faith and a turning away from God on the part of those who pray to the saints. Such prayer can spring from no other root than unbelief in God's requirement that every person must pray to Him alone, and must bring before Him every need, bodily or spiritual. Whoever abandons this and seeks help elsewhere breaks the commandment of God. Secondly, from this same root, the apostles of Antichrist introduced prayer to the saints among the people. Wishing to give it an air of rightness, they greatly humbled the people, declaring them evil and great sinners whose prayers God would not hear. At the same time they made God repulsive to them, saying that He was terribly angry with them. Therefore they set before the people the saints, sweetened with honeyed words, lavishly praising them as gracious and caring for sinners, interceding for those who place a holy offering on the altar. Because of such pleasing stories about the saints, sinful people imagine that the saints can calm God, just as stewards and marshals might pacify an earthly king's fierce anger against an accused man. In this way they form false notions about God and the saints, as though God were a cruel earthly monarch and the saints His gracious officials who, in return for gifts and services from sinners, earnestly intercede for them and so soothe God's wrath. With this crude, material notion they openly defend prayers and intercessions to the saints, likening God to an irate king and picturing the saints as His kindly stewards who, accepting gifts from sinners, seek favour for them with God.

And thus one error breeds another. Having been led by delusion into such prayer to the saints, people immediately think and believe wrongly about God and the saints, likening Him to an angry worldly king and the saints to those who, for gifts, plead on behalf of sinners. They suppose that whoever wins the saints' favour by giving them offerings, burning candles, fasting, keeping their feast-days, or showing them other honours thereby earns their intercession, and that the saints, overcome by gifts, will care for sinners. They think of them as magistrates who, for bribes, take the side of the guilty in court. From this delusion another quickly arises: when they hear so much about the benefits the saints can grant and how their favour may be obtained through gifts, they come to love the saints more than God and to place in them the hope that should have been placed in God alone, seeking from the saints what they ought to have sought from God. In this way they transfer their trust

from God to created beings, having heard that He is angry while the saints are gracious toward them. Therefore sinners, who do not cease from their sins and are not reformed by any grace of God, having abandoned God their Creator—the fountain of living waters in whom all their good is found—may be so deceived by the apostles of Antichrist that, even if they sometimes desire something truly good, they are misled through these intermediaries and turned away from the Creator to the creature, where they will never find what they hoped to find in the creature, having rejected the Creator with all His perfect goodness.

CHAPTER THIRTY FIVE

Prayer belongs to God alone; saints lack divine knowledge and power

Since we are discussing praying to saints, we must always stay true to Christ's faith, knowing that if we abandon it, we cannot escape evil. The Gospel clearly teaches us whom we should pray to. When the devil told Jesus, "I will give you all this if you bow down and worship me," Jesus replied, "Get away from me, Satan! For it is written: You shall worship the Lord your God and serve Him alone."¹ Here, Jesus made it clear that prayer should be directed only to God. This was important because the devil was trying to make Him pray to something other than God—a created being—which goes against true prayer. That's why Jesus emphasized that prayer must be offered only to God. All of Scripture, both the Old and New Testaments, teaches that prayer belongs to God alone. If people truly followed the meaning of faith, they would understand this. Since God created humanity, He alone has the ultimate authority over people. Just as He alone had the power to create them, He alone wants to rule over them, guide them, and provide for them in all things. God created people for His glory and wants to rule over them directly, receiving their love and prayers because only He can truly answer them. Only God fully knows each person, their nature, and the secrets of their hearts. No one in heaven, not even the person themselves, can fully understand their own heart—only God can. As Solomon said in his prayer to God: "You alone know the hearts of all people."² Therefore, prayer belongs to God alone,

¹ Matthew 4:9-10 - Deuteronomy 10:20

² 2 Chronicles 6:30

the Lord and Creator of all things. He wants us to turn to Him in everything because He can do all things. When we pray to Him properly, He knows exactly what is truly good for us—even better than we do ourselves. Sometimes, even a saint may pray for something that seems good, but God does not grant it because He knows it would not actually be for the best. This happened with both Paul and Moses.

So when it comes to hidden matters that only God knows—even things unknown to the highest angels, as Dionysius said³—how could prayers to saints possibly be reliable? If God sometimes does not grant requests even to good and holy people because He knows they are not truly beneficial, then how could saints, who lack God's perfect knowledge, be able to grant uncertain requests when they do not even know if what is being asked is truly good for the person?

3 Dionysius the Areopagite is mentioned here, but the writings attributed to him were written only at the end of the 5th century.

CHAPTER THIRTY SIX

Prayer belongs to God alone; saints neither accept nor mediate it

Again, all prayers to saints are made in insincere hypocrisy. How can those who pray to saints do so properly? They dishonor God with their serious sins, yet they seek favor from the saints through their prayers, provoking God's anger by breaking His commandments. How, then, could the saints accept such prayers? First, because human prayers do not belong to them. Second, because God's enemies, while insulting their Lord, seek the saints' favor through deceitful prayers—only wanting to escape their Lord's punishment through them. Or, perhaps most accurately, we could say that these blind and misled people do not even know where they are going. Furthermore, no one can prove from faith that saints accept divine honors, especially prayer, which belongs to God alone. When they lived on earth, they did not accept worship, sacrifices, or prayers—even though their knowledge of God was less than it is now in heaven. So, without a doubt, they would reject these things even more now than they did before. For example, it is written about Saint Peter: When he came to Cornelius, Cornelius met him, fell at his feet, and worshiped him. But Peter lifted him up and said, "Stand up! I am just a man like you."¹ Similarly, it is written about Saint Paul and Barnabas: When people wanted to offer sacrifices to them, the apostles Barnabas and Paul, upon hearing this, tore their clothes,

1 Acts of the Apostles 10: 15-16.

rushed into the crowd, and shouted, 'Men, why are you doing this? We are human, just like you! We are here to tell you to turn away from these useless idols and turn to the living God, who made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and everything in them.' " ² Despite saying these things and more, they barely managed to stop the crowds from offering sacrifices to them.

They refused to accept anything that belongs to God alone. How much more must this be true now, as they stand in the presence of God's glory, where they fall before Him and praise Him! Even here on earth, they showed that not even the greatest angels accept worship or prayer from humans. This is recorded in the Book of Revelation, where John himself says: "I, John, who heard and saw these things, fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed them to me. But he said to me: 'See that you do not do this! I am your fellow servant and the servant of your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God and pray to Him alone.'" ³ Thus, we have the testimony of the holy apostles and even the highest angels: they do not accept any honors that belong only to God—not worship, not prayer, not sacrifices. Even when such honors were mistakenly given to them, they rejected them and directed people to give them to God instead.

Wise people should recognize these truths, but instead, the apostles of the Antichrist oppose them, twisting Scripture, quoting church scholars, and using pagan ideas—claiming to have measured heaven and hell while destroying the simplicity of Christ's teaching. After much debate over these insincere ideas, they eventually admitted that prayer belongs to God alone. But they still insist that saints "guide" prayers, interceding to help weak and powerless prayers somehow struggle their way before God—since, according to them, prayer alone would not be enough unless the saints pleaded for it. This is what they have written: "We believe, and find in Scripture, that the saints in heaven help faithful Christians on earth through their prayers and loving assistance, according to their ability. Therefore, Christians may rightly ask them for help and intercession—without giving them the honor due to God alone, but rather showing them the respect appropriate for saints. Any excessive or improper devotion to saints should be rejected." ⁴ Oh, the wisdom of these people! They have waded through deep mud and think they have crossed a great river! They might as well try to teach the wind to blow gently,

² Acts of the Apostles 14:13-15 and 18.

³ Revelation 19:10.

⁴ This is a quote from articles by Prague priests on the observance of church orders (imprint in Palacký's AČ III. 269); they date from 1428 or 1429.

so that it does not knock over houses. They claim people should pray to saints with moderation, as if it would be harmful to ask too earnestly! But common sense tells us: if people seek help and intercession from saints, they must pray with great effort in order to be heard. If they pray weakly, as if half-asleep, the saints will not listen to them. Instead, they will say: "Hypocrites! You are mocking us!" So what is this, if not the devil being roasted on a pan—playing tricks on people? How absurd to set limits on prayer while teaching that asking saints for help is a matter of faith! But if it truly came from Christ's faith, it would not be full of such contradictions, nor would it encourage hesitation or fear. True faith calls for prayer that is wholehearted, confident, and earnest, so that those who seek will be worthy of what they ask. But if these prayers come from the faith of the Antichrist—crafted from many uncertain ideas, like sorcerers piecing together spells—then it makes sense for them to advise people to pray with "just the right amount," treating it as an uncertain and doubtful thing. Yet they do not dare to tell people that this faith is false—almost as if they had been fed a meal of stork beaks and now stand in the shadow of death. So, they dress it up in fancy and wise-sounding words, trying to sell the Antichrist's deception, instead of following the faith of Jesus Christ and seeking help from Him. True faith is like this: If someone overturns a cart into the mud, he asks others for help—not warning them to avoid getting dirty, but urging them to push hard. In the same way, a follower of God's faith—when he falls into the mud of sin—should not hesitate but should quickly throw himself upon God in trust. For He is the true helper, the one who rescues from sin and strengthens all good actions. As Scripture says: "My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth."⁵ He alone can powerfully lift someone out of the mud, even if they are stuck up to their neck.

5 Psalms 121: 2.

CHAPTER THIRTY SEVEN

Honouring saints excessively diminishes God's true worship and rightful devotion

But things get even more confusing when it comes to prayers asking saints for help: if the request is too strong, it supposedly causes harm. If it is too weak, it goes unheard. Either way, it doesn't work. Anyone who looks at this deception—how it is spread across the world and how these so-called masters take pride in their craft—would be amazed at this kind of teaching. They might as well teach farmers to beat their chests

and pray "just the right amount," carefully measured, while placing their trust in the protection of Christ's mother—having more hope in her than in God Himself! ¹ With full devotion, kneeling, bowing, and even crying, they pray. So how can they set "limits" on such prayers while claiming that they do not give the honor due to God to the saints? After all, prayer, fasting, keeping holy days, celebrating Mass, making sacrifices, and enduring suffering—all of these belong to God alone. And yet, these teachers not only encourage people to do these things for the saints, but they do so themselves. Tell me, when is there more glory in churches than on the feast days of saints? They spare no effort in ringing bells and playing organs in their honor. The hymns for saints are often more grand and joyful than those sung to God! If some random monk is declared a saint, his celebration is held in greater esteem than a sacred Sunday. By valuing these words about honoring the saints more than honoring God, they have completely lost all sense of proportion.

This excessive veneration—the kind of honor one might give to an earthly emperor, with sweet harmonized singing, flutes, bells, and excessive lights—has robbed God of the true worship He desires: worship that comes from the hearts of people. Because of this glorification of saints, people have been blinded and deceived. They no longer know what true service to God is. They cannot even understand whether God desires any honor beyond the music and singing that the messengers of the Antichrist have filled the churches with—to mislead the world.

¹ In the margin of the 1521 edition is written: "Prayer and worship should be offered to none but Christ the Lord in heaven, seated at the right hand of the Father."

CHAPTER THIRTY EIGHT

True prayer requires unwavering faith in God, not saints' intercession

When we look at the confusion that these so-called masters spread across the world to cause great harm, who is there to set things right and lead the world back to the true path? The world will not believe ordinary people over these great masters because it always accepts what seems grand and impressive in its eyes. But even though their wisdom may shine brightly before the world, when tested by faith, it will crumble like mud underfoot. That is why, in such confusing times, we must hold firmly to the apostolic faith, where we can find certainty, and to the clear teachings of the apostles. This is exactly what Saint James speaks about when he says: "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, without doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord" ¹

¹ James 1:5-7.

Anyone who wants to see this clearly can understand that those who lack God's wisdom should pray directly to God, who gives wisdom generously to those who seek it. He does not reproach them for asking, unlike a miser who gives a gift to a poor man and then shames him for it. That is why gifts from unjust people will not truly benefit you. But God gives His gifts freely and kindly, wanting people to be transformed by them. And He says that when someone prays to Him for wisdom, they must not doubt in faith.² This means that when a person asks God for something, they must truly believe that they will receive it. If someone prays but doubts that God will grant their request, they will receive nothing from Him. This is the clear target³—whoever can aim for it should try: If someone needs wisdom, grace, or other gifts, they should pray directly to God with confidence that He will give it to them. Their own prayer alone, combined with hope and faith, is enough. The saints do not intervene on their behalf. But where do these clever masters fit in, who make it difficult for people to pray to God by insisting that they need the saints' intercession first? Even then, they limit how much intercession people can ask for, as if prayers must be carefully measured and weighed. They tell people to request the saints' help, but not to trust in them too much—to pray to them, but without putting their hearts into it. In this system, people are made to feel that they cannot pray to God without the saints' help because they are unworthy. Yet at the same time, they do not dare to ask the saints too earnestly for intercession. What kind of prayer is this? It is like trying to walk after having both legs and arms cut off!

How, then, can such people ever follow the words of the apostles, who teach to pray without doubting? Since they do not dare approach God on their own but must first seek intercession, they are already doubting before they even begin their prayer. They rely on someone else's support instead of placing their trust directly in God. How can they have strong faith that God will answer a prayer that has been passed around through so many intermediaries? Their prayer is not rooted in faith, so it will never truly reach God. Every person—no matter how sinful—must pray to God with faith and trust that He will hear them, forgive them, and grant them His grace, leading them to repentance and ultimately to salvation. Even the worst sinners have approached God in this way and were heard.⁴

² James 1:6.

³ i.e., a sure goal.

⁴ Luke 18:13 n.

The Bible tells of a sinful person who prayed directly to God, believing that He would hear them without any saint's intercession, and they found grace immediately through their own prayer. The same happened with the Canaanite woman. When Jesus' disciples asked for her, He refused at first, making her persist in her own faith until she overcame His silence. Then He said to her: "O woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish."⁵ Likewise, the thief on the cross, facing death, turned to Jesus with great faith, saying: "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom." And Jesus answered him: "Truly I say to you, today you will be with Me in paradise."⁶

These sinners reached God through their own faith alone, and immediately they were made worthy of heaven.⁷ That is why Saint James directs every person who prays to go directly to God with unwavering faith, believing that they will receive what they rightly ask for. So, what place do these confused teachings of the masters have in God's word? They corrupt people's understanding of God, using strange rituals as if human prayers cannot reach Him on their own. But I consider their so-called wisdom to be faithless. I may be insignificant in their eyes, but I see that the people under their teaching lack true wisdom from God and do not understand their rituals.⁸ They blindly accept everything the masters tell them, like pigs that swallow food without chewing. One moment they pray to God, then to Mary, then to the saints; sometimes they recite the Lord's Prayer, then the Creed, then the Hail Mary—all mixed together. They rush through their prayers, striking their chests, not knowing what is better or more pleasing: God or the saints, the Hail Mary or the Creed, or everything all at once. Their prayers are chaotic, thrown together randomly. And this confusion is the direct result of the masters' teachings, where nothing is given proper order, and everything is treated as equally important, no matter what it is.

5 Matthew 15:28.

6 Matthew 27:38; Mark 15:27; Luke 23:42-43; John 19:18.

7 James 1:5-7.

8 In the margin of the 1521 edition is written: "He speaks the prayers of the present Christian people."

CHAPTER THIRTY NINE

All help comes from God alone, not through saints' intercession

But when we talk about the help that the masters insist people must seek from the saints and pray to them for, we see that neither the prophets nor the apostles ever directed people to such help. They did not seek it themselves either but placed all their trust in the Lord God alone. That is why the Psalms say: "I lift my eyes to the hills—where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven

and earth." ¹ And again: "I lift my eyes to You, who dwell in the heavens. Just as the eyes of servants look to the hand of their master, and the eyes of a maid to the hand of her mistress, so our eyes look to the Lord our God until He has mercy on us." ² And again: "For He is my God, my Savior, my helper, and so I will not perish. My salvation is in God, and my praise is to the God of my help. My hope is in God. Trust in Him, all you people; pour out your hearts before Him, for God is our helper forever." ³

So, go ahead, masters—use your so-called wisdom, borrowed from paganism, and try to conjure up as many promises of help from the saints as you claim! But the holy prophets of old spoke far more clearly about God than these new tricksters, who disgrace and diminish God in people's hearts. True and glorious faith, built upon God, teaches that we must seek all help from Him. The righteous endure many hardships, but God delivers them from them all: "The Lord watches over all their bones; not one of them will be broken." ⁴ He counts their bones and even the hairs on their heads so that not a single one falls without His will. That is why the greatest help for a person comes from Him, for He has power over all things that oppress or trouble people. He can deliver them from all of it. He is the one who feels the deepest compassion in times of distress and is able to strengthen human weakness. If someone lacks the strength to do what is right, God can give them the help they need. That is why the psalmist says: "My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth." He chose the best source of help, because no one else can provide as much help as the One who created heaven and earth ⁵ by His power. There is no hardship so great that He cannot overcome it and rescue those who seek His help. And if He can handle the greatest struggles, then surely, He can help with smaller troubles too. Yet people sometimes despair over small problems, because their faith is weak. But God can strengthen the weak against even the hardest challenges. If someone feels unable to serve Him properly or pray to Him as they should, He can help them. If someone struggles to repent from their sins and cries out to Him for help, He is ready to assist them. There are countless examples in the Holy Scriptures that prove God's power to help, and if necessary, many more could be shared.

1 Psalms 121:1-2.

2 Psalms 123:1-2.

3 Psalms 62:7-9.

4 Psalms 34:21.

5 Psalms 121:2.

CHAPTER FORTY

God's grace precedes saints' intercession; their prayers may be ineffective.

However, regarding the certainty of what the masters claim about the great graces of the saints, who supposedly care for sinners and fervently pray or intercede for them—if what they say is true, it should be evident in this way: If God hears the saints' prayers for sinners, then their prayers must be effective, causing sinners to turn from their sins and live a holy life. After all, the saints would never intercede for sinners with any other purpose. And since the world is full of people praying to and serving the saints, there should be no sinners left, as the saints would have secured grace for all. But since sinners are often the ones who serve the saints the most and yet remain the worst, then either the saints' prayers for sinners are ineffective before God, or they do not happen at all. This contradicts the masters' arguments and exposes them as false.

Furthermore, no matter what the masters say about the great graces the saints have for sinners, they cannot claim that the saints' grace comes before God's grace. God is boundless goodness, while the saints have only a limited amount, and whatever goodness they have comes from Him. Therefore, God's grace for sinners must come first, meaning He can show mercy before the saints do. However, He does so wisely, having decreed that sinners will receive grace if they repent. Secondly, God's mercy and grace toward sinners are greater than that of the saints because He is infinite goodness. Standing with sinners in His boundless goodness, He can give them secret grace in their hearts and move them to repentance even before the saints intercede. When He secretly moves someone to do good through the Holy Spirit, no one in heaven knows unless He chooses to reveal it. For God is present with the saints in heaven, with those in hell, and with everyone on earth, for "in Him, we live, move, and exist." Therefore, He, being everywhere, can act in someone on earth in a way that even those in heaven do not know. This means the saints' intercession cannot always grasp God's vast and boundless presence, as He acts with His goodness before the saints can.

CHAPTER FORTY ONE

God's grace precedes saints' intercession; their prayers for sinners fail

We also know from the Scriptures that the saints do not intercede for those whom God hates because of their constant sinning and refusal to repent. For if the saints wished well for such people—those whom God Himself rejects—it would mean they desire something that God does not want and even forbids. Therefore, if the saints in heaven wanted something that God hates and acted differently than His will, they would be sinning and would no longer be saints. But it is impossible to think this of them, because they became saints by striving to align themselves completely with God's will, so they could never turn away from it. That is why scholars say that the saints are not friends to God's enemies. So, those who despise or hate holiness pray to the saints in vain. They want to reach God through the saints, but they refuse to follow the saints' example of good deeds—therefore, they have no saint in heaven as a friend. The Scriptures confirm this truth.

CHAPTER FORTY TWO

God rejects sinners' prayers; saints' intercession cannot override His justice

God tells the prophet:

"Do not pray for this people or accept praise and prayers on their behalf, and do not plead with Me, for I will not listen to you. Do you not see what they are doing in the cities of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem? The sons gather wood, the fathers light the fire, and the women knead dough to bake cakes as offerings to the Queen of Heaven" (which means the moon).¹ The same prophet says: "The Lord said to me: Even if Moses and Samuel stood before Me, I could not show mercy to this people. Send them away from Me!"² These scriptures show that God refused to hear even the prayers of the greatest saints for sinners who continued to sin and refused to repent. Again, God speaks about a wicked people: "Even if these three men—Noah, Daniel, and Job—were in the land, and I commanded the sword to pass through it and destroy both people and animals, these three men would save only themselves. As surely as I live, declares the Lord God, they would not save their sons and daughters, only their own lives."³ Noah, Daniel, and Job were so honored by God that their prayers could help many and even prevent great disasters. Their prayers had the power to stop events from happening because of their righteousness.

1 Jeremiah 7: 16-18.

2 Jeremiah 15: 1.

3 Ezekiel 14: 14, 17-18.

However, here God speaks about people who pretended to follow Him but continued in sin, impurity, and rebellion in their hearts. So, if God sent destruction upon them, even if Noah, Daniel, and Job were among them with their children, they would not be able to save anyone but themselves. Their prayers would not stop God's justice or save their own sons and daughters. If even these three righteous men could not change God's judgment, then who else could? No one could turn away God's justice from such sinners. These three were the greatest examples of faithfulness, unmatched in heaven or on earth.

Therefore, Christians must believe, according to these and other scriptures, that God does not hear the prayers of sinners or accept the prayers of saints on their behalf. As it is written: "Whoever refuses to listen to God's law, his prayer is cursed and will turn into sin." Likewise, God will not listen to the prayers of the saints in heaven or on earth for sinners who despise Him. As stated earlier, God told a great prophet: "Do not pray for these people, for I will not listen to you. Even if Moses and Samuel, the two most righteous men, stood before Me and prayed for these people who reject My law, I would not listen to them." So how could the saints in heaven pray for those whom God Himself rejects? This belief, based on God's word, cannot be false, and the saints followed this faith to enter heaven. If they remained faithful on earth, why would they abandon that faith in heaven and pray for those who insult God and break His laws? It is absurd to think that sinners can bribe their way into heaven by offering gifts to the saints, expecting them to plead for them in return. All who turn away from God's commandments are cursed, and their prayers are disgusting and cursed as well. If their own prayers are cursed, how could someone else's prayer on their behalf be blessed?

These false teachings about the saints' intercession were created by the servants of the Antichrist, who use them to profit from the ignorant. They lure the ungodly with offerings, gifts, and candles, making people believe that the saints desire such things and will intercede for them in exchange. But this is the deception of the blind, as corrupt priests keep whispering lies into their ears and exploiting them through the names of the saints.

CHAPTER FORTY THREE

Christ alone intercedes; saints lack power to mediate for sinners

But since the topic of intercession has been discussed here and it is being denied by me, it is not denied because someone might think that someone is so holy that they don't need intercession. Rather, intercession is denied because it is sought by those who are unworthy of it and they search for it where it cannot be found. For, anyone who continually sins is never worthy of intercession, as they always intend to sin, and that is why they seek intercession from one who has no power to intercede. Therefore, we do not deny the intercession of faith in Christ, but we ask for it. This intercession of faith in Christ is the one that Saint John refers to when he says: "My little children, I write to you so that you do not sin; but if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He is the atonement for our sins, and not only for ours, but also for the sins of the whole world." ¹ This is our faith in intercession. No one in heaven has the power or the right to intercede on their own, except Christ, the Son of God, who is the highest sworn bishop, as these and other words of His apostles express. If anyone else were to intercede for sinners, aside from Christ, the Son of God, His apostles would not have kept this intercession silent. But about the very same intercession, which is in Christ, he clearly says that we have an advocate with our Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. ² For no one is fit to intercede before God for others, except those who are freed from accusation through the intercession of Christ, and no one could be saved if Christ's intercession were not for them. For all are recognized as worthy of accusation, except Christ, as Saint Paul says: "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." ³ For through one man, sin entered the world, and through sin, death entered, and in this way, all have sinned." ⁴ "As the Scripture says: there is no one righteous, no one who understands, no one who seeks God; all have turned away, together they have become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one." ⁵ Therefore, Christ alone is found among all without the accusation of any sin, conceived by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, only He is justly credited with such righteousness, so that He can be an intercessor for the unjust, and in the same way, Saint Paul proclaims His priesthood, saying: "But Christ, because He remains forever, has a permanent priesthood. Therefore, He is able to save completely, as He always lives to intercede for them,

1 1 John 2: 1-2.

2 1 John 2: 1.

3 Romans 3: 23.

4 Romans 5: 12.

5 Romans 3: 10-12.

for He is always alive to intercede for us. Such a bishop was needed for us, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners, exalted above the heavens." ⁶ Here, Saint Paul includes himself, all the apostles, and all people among sinners. Therefore, he says about all of us sinners: "Such a bishop was needed for us, holy, undefiled, and separated in every way from sinners," having no weakness of sin with them, but possessing the full strength of innocence with great grace, being divine in power, so that He could bear the sins of all, making enough for them before God. Therefore, such a bishop was needed for us sinners, to buy all goods with His blood, so that He could also intercede for all those He has bought.

Thus, our faith is that no one can enter heaven except through His redemption and intercession. The high priest of the Old Testament, who symbolized Christ, had to offer sacrifices and pray for the whole Jewish people. Likewise, Christ, in reality, offered Himself as a perfect sacrifice to purify our consciences from evil deeds. He now stands before God, forever interceding for us. This faith was proclaimed to the whole world by the apostles and has never been revoked. Even though the Antichrist, Christ's greatest enemy, has tried to erase this faith from the world and has introduced many false intercessors—saints, monks, and even corrupt individuals—placing Christ among them as just one of many, they can never deny this truth: that all the saints together could not redeem even one person with their blood. Nor do they have the right to intercede for anyone. Christ alone, through His sacrifice, has been given the divine right to intercede for all. Since all who enter heaven do so only through His redemption, it does not mean they become priests with the same right to intercede. The saints in heaven still hold to this truth: no one can enter heaven except in the same way they did—through Christ's redemption and intercession. Likewise, all who come after must enter through Him, because He is "the way," and no one comes to the Father except through Him.

Therefore, just as everyone needs his redemption, so does every individual need his intercession, without relying on all those imagined intercessors. He has more power to intercede than all the angels and saints in heaven, and he has the right to intercede granted by the Father, God. But God has never said anything about anyone else being authorized to intercede for others. This is why the belief in Christ and his intercession cannot be attributed to anyone else in heaven. If everyone had the same power and right to these things that Christ has,

6 Hebrews 7: 24-26.

then Christ would be equal to others. Therefore, the faith in Christ wouldn't be more valuable than in anyone else, and in fact, it would be less valuable, because the actions show that others are standing in the same position.

So this matter is mostly determined by favor; the saint whom priests have praised the most is the one in whom faith shines the brightest, and that saint is considered the greatest. Because of this, without a doubt, the highest praise has fallen upon the mother of Christ. Even today, people have exalted her above Christ himself and placed their hope of salvation in her. But this was introduced by the Antichrist to deceive the world, so it is not true faith. No one has the right to intercede for everyone unless they are both God and man. A mere human cannot plead for sinners who refuse to repent or for hypocrites who only pretend to seek God. Since Christ is God, he knows the hearts of all people and understands who is truly worthy of his intercession. That is why he does not intercede for those who seek his help only with flattering words or deep bows—he is not fooled by them. Instead, he intercedes for those who are truly chosen, those who have sincerity in their hearts, his sheep who recognize his voice and follow him.⁷ Because Christ is truly God, he knows without a doubt for whom he should intercede and whose prayer will be pleasing to God. No saint can have this knowledge, as no saint can truly see who has been chosen as a child of God or who has genuine sincerity in their heart. If a saint were to pray for someone who is actually rejected by God, their intercession would be useless. That is why intercession belongs only to Christ, the Son of God, because he alone can intercede with absolute certainty and authority based on his act of redemption. No one else has as much mercy and compassion for sinners as Christ, who died for them and washed them clean with his own blood. Because he sees the outcome of his suffering and sacrifice, he is the most fitting one to intercede for his people—those he has bought at the price of his life—especially in their moments of sorrow and failure. When they struggle with weakness and fall into the traps of the devil, they suffer guilt and a troubled conscience. But when they turn back to Christ, seeking his help and comfort, they hope for his forgiveness and grace in their distress and grief. Even those who sincerely desire to do good are sometimes troubled by sin and the temptations of this world, even though they do not intend to sin and try to avoid it. That is why Saint John says, "If anyone sins accidentally, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous."⁸ This means that when good people stumble and fall into sin, they should not despair or feel abandoned and hopeless, but instead rise again with great

⁷ John 10: 4.

⁸ 1 John 2: 1.

hope in God through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Since he died for us and was appointed by God as the eternal priest, he is able to save forever, always living to intercede for us. Through him, we have a secure way to approach God with confidence. Because of his merit, we should always seek grace—for the forgiveness of sins, relief from great sorrow, and the fulfillment of all necessary needs. And if someone cannot fully understand how Christ intercedes for us before God or how he prays on our behalf, at the very least, they should hold onto this: in all things, seek God's grace through Christ's merit—through his great suffering and cruel death, which he endured entirely for our sake.

Thus, His intercession will always be carried out and fulfilled when we seek God and His grace in the name of Jesus and pray through Him, making our prayers to God. Therefore, He is always alive to intercede for those who seek God and His grace through Him. And we pray to Him, for with God the Father and the Holy Spirit, He is one inseparable God; therefore, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, the inseparable God, all deserve our prayers, to whom we say: "Our Father, who art in heaven, forgive us our sins." But the Son of God was incarnated through the life of the Virgin Mary and is both true God and true man. Therefore, He, through His humanity, redeemed us and earned our salvation and all the graces, which we must seek from God through Him as the mediating peacemaker, so that we may always have access to God in all our needs, having the greatest hope in Him, when He gave us His only-begotten Son to reconcile us with Himself through Him and appointed Him as our intercessor before Him forever, so that nothing can prevent us from receiving what we need, unless our laziness, unbelief, or some contempt and ingratitude for the greatest graces He has given us through Jesus Christ, His Son, is to blame. These things on our part can prepare us to lose the good that God has prepared for us in His Son.

But how He intercedes or prays for someone, He clearly showed in His final prayer, saying: "Father, I do not ask for the world, but for those You have given Me, having taken them out of the world."⁹ Here, He clearly excludes the world from His prayer and directs it towards those who have left the world for Him, believed in Him, received His words, and remained in Him until death. Therefore, those who are His sheep today are those who hear His voice, believe in Him,¹⁰ and follow His footsteps. They separate themselves from the world for His sake and place all their hope in Him for all that is good. He intercedes

9 John 17: 9.

10 John 10: 4.

for them in their needs, inclining God toward them with His graces. But He does not intercede for the world, because the world does not believe His words, does not listen to Him, is ungrateful for His grace, and opposes Him in all its ways. The world is completely drowned in vile praise, subject to corruption, seeking praise in its depravity, defiling itself in indulgence, and delighting in the worst of things. It is intoxicated with the most detestable spirit, opposing Christ Jesus, through whom it reaches for false and deadly things, thereby completely severing its connection with God, losing the presence of God's dwelling within itself, and falling into eternal damnation. Therefore, the world is so far removed from God that it can hardly find a remedy for its wounds due to its attachment to iniquities, which it inherits through generations. Through its offices, classes, cities, fortresses, possessions, businesses, food, and all its peculiarities, the world passes down diverse iniquities, and it considers these falsehoods and sins as joy, profit, rights, and even necessity.

Therefore, neither the death of Christ nor His intercession, nor any of God's graces, nor any divine remedy can reach this world, as long as it remains in such a foul ferment against God. Nor can any participation in the divine come to a worldly person until he separates himself from the world with his heart, deeds, affection, fellowship, and abandonment of iniquity, by which he separates himself from Christ. And since Christ does not intercede for the world nor for those who love the world and crawl under its wings, who is in heaven to intercede for this world? Therefore, according to the faith, no one would dare to affirm that anyone could move anything in heaven or have any intercession against Christ, since He, having the right to intercession from God,¹¹ rejects the world from it; in heaven, no one, lacking such a right to intercede, could intercede for this world, which is opposed to God. For they do not exceed Christ in grace; He has the greatest grace for sinners who seek it from Him directly. The saints, whatever grace they have, received it from His fullness, and all who are to be there must take every grace from His fullness.

Therefore, no matter how much evidence they may gather about the graces of saints for sinners, they will prove nothing else but many offenses against the faith that is in Christ. Therefore, Antichrist, who is the priest of this world, has introduced this against Christ—the intercession of many saints for this world, which Christ excludes from His prayer and intercession. For Antichrist has discovered all the powers and graces that are in the saints, and has learned to make remedies for this world from them for every wound,

¹¹ John 17:2 and 9.

through which the world believes in Antichrist for the healing of its wounds, which are never to be healed: the ulcerous festering, swelling, and the withered puffiness. It rests in death within its wounds, without sorrow, for it stands under the heavenly treatment, making the world believe it has the hope of salvation, albeit falsely.

CHAPTER FORTY FOUR

Christ's intercession alone grants power to human prayers before God

What I am saying here about Christ's intercession is also confirmed by some of the doctors, especially St. Gregory. In explaining the book of Job, regarding the words: "Who will give me a helper, to hear my request from the Almighty?" ¹ he says: "Indeed, Saint Job knew that if human prayers were to be taken for eternal deliverance, rest, or benefit, they could only be heard through their own Advocate, of whom the Apostle John says: 'If anyone sins, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours, but also for the sins of the whole world.' ²" Also, the Apostle Paul says about Him: "Christ Jesus, who died for us, and now has risen from the dead, who sits at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us." ³ Therefore, the fact that the only-begotten Son intercedes for man certainly means that He shows Himself as man before the co-eternal Father; and His plea for mankind signifies that the human nature has been taken up to the height of His divinity. He intercedes for us not by voice, but by mercy; for what He did not want to be dishonored in the elect, He accepted and delivered them. Thus, an advocate is sought so that human requests are heard, for if the intercession of the mediator did not intercede for us, without a doubt, the voices of our prayers would be lost or silent before God's ear."

These things are spoken by St. Gregory, somewhat above us. Therefore, although it may be unclear, it is especially to confirm the faith that he cites the apostles regarding Christ's intercession and affirms His intercession so strongly that all human prayers would be in vain, and now distant from God's ear. God would not hear any people, because our prayers have power and success through His merits and intercession. Likewise, our good deeds are accepted by God only through the merits of His good deeds. Therefore, our praying and meriting in Him gain power, as He is the root from which we draw life and strength in Him, because

1 Job 31: 35.

2 1 John 2: 1-2.

3 Romans 8: 34.

He first took away our sin, through which we were dead, and then gave the power of true life, along with merits, and in addition, He stands before God's face for us with His merits and prayers, so that we may pray effectively through Him to God and perform works suitable for earning eternal glory. But since without His intercession, human prayers would fall silent or be mute before God's ear, the intercessions of the saints would also be of no use to those who hope in them. For, if their intercessions were enough for humankind, God would not have deprived all people of their prayers, making them mute before His ear, as if they had no power to call out. Rather, it is only through the intercession of Christ that human prayers are considered valid and able to reach God's ear.

CHAPTER FORTY FIVE

Christ alone is the true intercessor; multiple intercessors are deceptive

Now let us hear the words of Saint Augustine on the words of Saint John, where he says: "If anyone sins, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous."¹ He says: "This just and great man, that is, Saint John, who drank in hidden mysteries from the Lord's breast, the one who testified about Christ's divinity, introduced Christ as the advocate, not himself. He would rather place himself among sinners to have Christ as his advocate, than place himself in place of Christ as an advocate." And further, he says: "Whoever believes this has not committed heresy. For where did the division come from? It came from the people saying: 'We are righteous, we make sinners righteous, we pray, we intercede.'" - Here, Antichrist is striking at the heart of the matter! From these words, we can see that the belief in numerous intercessors is flawed, in which Antichrist is subtly revealed and brings shame, though it may not be immediately apparent. It is clear that many intercessors began to arise when a division occurred among Christians, with many monastic orders being formed among them, each boasting and lying against one another, saying: "We are righteous, we make the unclean holy, we make sinners righteous, we pray, we intercede." Just as the body of Antichrist is divided by such proud distinctions, they have led the people to divisions among themselves and among the saints, so that, according to their boasting, people would prefer some saints over others to intercede for them. Therefore, they lie to the people, so that, as long as they can, they make their intercessions

1 1 John 2: 1.

seem sweet. And when their intercession does not bring in as much money, they offer the intercession of saints, so that a larger crowd will be drawn to the offering, as they can surround it with even bigger lies than their own intercessions, praising the saints' holiness and their love for sinners in an exaggerated way, adding something extra to each saint to make them more marketable, like a well-groomed horse at the market. By elevating their holiness in this way, they make a great profit, consuming heaven, hell, and earth through these proud intercessions, which they dishonestly lie about or invent false stories about the saints for their own gain.

CHAPTER FORTY SIX

False glorification of saints overshadows Christ's unique role in salvation

But since this scholar ¹ wisely rejects such intercessions of Saint John, because he himself did not get involved in them, acknowledging that, as one of the sinners, he preferred to have Christ as his intercessor rather than making himself an intercessor for the sinners or calling himself one, it is clear from this that neither the apostles nor other righteous people dared to take on these intercessions for themselves, nor did they dare to seek them from God without Christ Jesus himself, who was established by God as the intercessor for all those who are worthy of his intercession. Otherwise, the faith given in Christ would be in vain if the apostles or other saints took on these intercessions, as it is still in vain through the work of the Antichrist, who is feeding his belly through it. For the intercession of saints and other gains are multiplied through them, pulling things from the Scriptures with a false spirit to glorify the saints, so that through this glorification, the world might wrongly think that the Antichrist greatly favors the saints, as if he were close to them, and that the Antichrist greatly favors the salvation of the world through the saints, proclaiming their holiness as beneficial to the world, while under this, he deceitfully diminishes the great salvation of Jesus Christ and makes it forgotten by the world. If any monk were called a saint, he would seem to be more important for the salvation of people than Christ. For the Antichrist covers every saint with such holiness and power for the salvation of the world, that the world, eagerly clinging to the saints and hearing their goodness from them and in them, would no longer seek Christ.

1 i.e. St. Augustine.

CHAPTER FORTY SEVEN

Christ is the sole intercessor; saints rest in God's presence

When we began talking about the secure intercession we have in Christ, Master Protiva ¹ also adds to the good people, saying that it is certainly fitting for people to worship Christ, and that there is no need to accept any other saints for reconciliation when speaking with Him. He also says that it would be foolish for anyone to seek another intercessor, and that in the early church, prayer was especially directed to Christ as the mediator for spiritual help. When this was done, the holy church prospered and grew in goodness more than it does now with many made-up and newly invented intercessions.

This shows wise people that the secure faith about intercession is found in Christ for those who are worthy of it according to faith. Since the world has no intercession, even though the world has hope in many intercessions based on Antichrist's promises of intercession from the saints, the new and invented intercessions are empty and deceptive. Around these, the world labors like around a dead idol, although it has never heard an answer from it or received any help from it. Having drunk the poison of the Antichrist through this dead idol, it speaks many lies about it, believing that there is life in death, saying with the pagans: "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!" ²

Therefore, a few more words about the saints, through whom the world is entangled and poisoned with a sweet delight from heaven. They say to the world that the saints in heaven now have greater grace, being without bodies, than they had while dwelling in the body on earth. With this talk, they try to prove those intercessions, promising the world that the saints, being full of great grace, are now the cause of good for sinners, taking care of them more than when they lived on earth.

Therefore, the words they speak about grace can be denied in the sense they apply it, but we must accept the truth, considering the true life the saints had here and now have there. They have nothing there that they had here, and they had nothing here that they now have. But they believed they would have something else there, and in hope, they expected what they now have. So, the acts of merit they had here are no longer present for themselves or for others. They no longer have those real services they had here for merit and for the benefit of others. Thus, we believe that here is the place and time for merit, and there is the time for reward. And so, it is said: "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord; for the Spirit says they may rest from their labors;

¹ Wycliffe in *Trialogue IV*, ch. 30.

² Acts of the Apostles 19: 34.

for their deeds follow them,"³ that is, the reward for their deeds goes with them. Therefore, this statement applies to those who are still living, as long as time remains for them to act, as it says: "As long as you have time, do good to all,"⁴ because "the night comes when no one can do anything."⁵ Therefore, if the dead could do more good after death than they could while alive, these true words would not be valid: "As long as you have time, do good to all." For if their good deeds were to have greater success there, then time for them would only begin after death. But since there is no time for them there, time is set before them here to do good deeds. Thus, Saint Peter, knowing that after death he would not be able to encourage people to do good, says to certain faithful people: "Therefore, I intend to remind you always of these things, although you know them and are established in the present truth. I think it right, as long as I am in this body, to stir you up by reminding you; for I know that I will soon lay aside my body, as our Lord Jesus Christ has shown me. But I will do my best to remind you of these things after my death."⁶ In this statement, Saint Peter shows his earnestness for the faithful, that he frequently taught and reminded them, living among them, and wanted to guide them through constant teaching and reminders so that they would be wise and established in the truth they currently have, which is the truth we must keep according to God's commandments and the faith of Jesus Christ. He wanted them to understand it justly and wisely, and "be established in this truth, so that opposing things would not draw them away from it." Therefore, knowing that he would die soon, he diligently led them, urging them to remember these things after his death and continue in them. From this, one could understand, if they wished, that Saint Peter had a care for good things before his death, which he could not do after his death. He had love for the people, desiring to guide them to goodness. And he did not rely on the idea that after his death he could do as much or more for them. Therefore, he did what he could and as long as he could, knowing that after death he would not be able to preach, encourage, or write letters to them.

So, choose wisely who is truly wise and who has the greatest power, and compare the grace of the apostles who were present then with those who are now absent. Confirm the truth without deceiving people. For there is a difference between speaking boldly out of pride and false beliefs, and speaking with the certainty of faith as shown in Scripture. It is wrong to make great claims where even the smallest things cannot be stated with certainty—like falsely saying that the saints rule over God and that He does nothing without their counsel. Therefore, when we speak

3 Revelation 14:13.

4 Galatians 6:10.

5 John 9:4.

6 2 Peter 1:12-15.

about the idea that saints, now in heaven, have greater grace than they had on earth, we can accept this in terms of their experience of God. They love God more now than they did in their mortal bodies. Being in His presence, they have complete fulfillment—not only are they inflamed with burning love, but they also experience full joy in Him, so much so that their hearts cannot reach beyond this fullness. They have an overflowing measure of grace, completely absorbed in divine glory and love, which leaves no room for anything else. Their minds, desires, or feelings cannot be occupied with anything else because they are entirely consumed by this glory and passionate love, leaving everything else behind. This can be seen in Saint Paul, who, when caught up into the third heaven, did not know whether he was there in the body or out of it.⁷ For true glory and joy would not be complete if they allowed a person to turn to anything else or took them away from their true home with God.

Concerning these matters, we can speak only feebly; but there is more there than has entered into the heart of man.⁸ So, when we talk about the grace of the saints, we can say that no messenger of the Antichrist is wise enough to fully describe their many graces, by which they surpass the earthly love for God. This love is now fulfilled in their direct experience of God, as they are completely satisfied in His joy. To explain this, we can use an example from nature—specifically, grain that is sown to produce food. Wheat or other grains have one purpose and use when they are planted and another when they are prepared as food. First, they are ground, crushed, and then cooked or baked. At that stage, they are no longer suitable for planting and growing new grain because their ability to sprout and reproduce has been taken away. Instead, they are now transformed into nourishment, prepared for eating and satisfaction. Before, when they were growing, they could not yet be food in this way. And once they have become food, they are no longer capable of growth or reproduction. A wise farmer knows this—he first sows the grain so it can grow and bring a rich harvest. But once it has been turned into delicious food, he does not give it to the sower to scatter in the field again. Instead, he enjoys it at the feast. The process of sowing and multiplying comes with toil and hardship, but the enjoyment of the harvest, shared with wine at a banquet, is filled with joy.

From these things, anyone who wishes can understand that the saints, in their blessed state, exist in a condition vastly different from their earthly one. The deeds they performed here for the benefit of others are no longer their concern. Instead, they now experience only

7 2 Corinthians 12: 2

8 1 Corinthians 2: 9

joy and complete fulfillment in God, lacking nothing. They enjoy perfect rest, free from all labor, worries, and earthly affections. Nothing holds their thoughts except the pure joy of being satisfied in God. Otherwise, their joy would not be complete if anything from this world could still draw them back.

CHAPTER FORTY EIGHT

Saints' desires are unknown; only God's mysteries are certain

But they still argue about this as their last defense: they don't want to give up the idea of the saints' intercession. So they claim that since the saints are in such great joy, they must naturally desire good things for us.

This idea can be taken in two ways. When Scripture does not clearly state something, and it remains a mystery known only to God, people may speculate about it, believing it seems likely or even true. In such cases, it is not right to either fully confirm or completely deny these things. Instead, we should acknowledge whatever is true before God in these mysteries. Whether the saints' goodwill toward us is great or small, we should praise God for it and always appreciate what is good. However, insisting on uncertain things about the saints without scriptural support—and turning them into laws that people must believe as part of their faith—is truly strange. It is not an act of goodness when a man, reeking of beer, speaks confidently about the desires and graces of the saints rejoicing in heaven. Having neither seen nor heard anything himself, yet puffed up with pride, he wants to act like a master of things he has not even begun to understand. He tries to create laws for people about things that have never even entered the human heart. This is why Saint Paul, when he was caught up into the third heaven—"whether in the body or out of the body, I do not know; God knows"¹—did not even know about his own condition while he was there. So how could he have asked about the saints' desires or what they wish for others when he didn't even know about himself? Instead, he made it clear that "no eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no human heart has conceived"² what is there, and that it is not proper for a person to speak about things beyond human understanding.

1 2 Corinthians 12: 2.

2 1 Corinthians 2: 9.

CHAPTER FORTY NINE

Saints assist through God; true communion honours them, not false claims

But this bold arrogance, so bloated with excess that it can barely see past its own fat, confidently claims things that have never entered its heart.¹ It is only led by error, spreading falsehoods to increase greed. This is what opens many people's mouths to harmful lies and false testimony.

Many people falsely accuse us, saying that we insult the saints, disregard them, and claim they are of no benefit or help to people here on earth. But we are far from saying such things! On the contrary, according to our faith, we acknowledge and hold in hope that the saints are co-heirs of the future good, and we believe in their benefit and help—whatever assistance or blessing God has given them for the righteous on earth, we are grateful to Him for it. However, the saints themselves cannot provide any benefits or help to those living here. Only God can give through them whatever He chooses to give. And He does not grant anything unless someone first seeks it from Him—both what He possesses and what the saints have received from Him. For every good and perfect gift comes from above,² from Him. And if He does not grant His blessings, the saints cannot give anything at all.

Therefore, we affirm our belief in the saints as expressed in the Creed: "I believe in the communion of saints." If this faith were truly held with understanding and sincerity, no one could have a better relationship with the saints, honor them more rightly, or receive their help more truthfully than by living in true goodness and friendship with them. For faith is not just about words—it is not enough to simply say, "I believe in the communion of saints." If we do not live it out in action or hope to attain it, then what good is merely saying it with our lips while not truly striving for it?

1 i.e. priests.

2 James 1: 17.

CHAPTER FIFTY

The Holy Spirit unites saints in Christ, sharing merits and joy

First, it says: "I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy universal Church," and then it continues: "I believe in the communion of saints." The Holy Spirit creates this communion, or friendship, among the saints. This means the unity of all members in Christ's spiritual body and their connection to their head—Christ—through faith and love. This body includes all saints, from the very first—Abel—to the last saint who will be born before Judgment Day. We call all of them the holy Church,

the bride of Christ, or a hidden, spiritual body, with Christ as its head. This spiritual body of Christ receives all spiritual power and the life of grace from its head, Christ. In the same way, every righteous person who belongs to this body receives strength and life from Christ. That's why we believe in the communion of saints, which exists now and will continue forever. The saints share in the rewards of all good deeds, leading to eternal joy. Each saint shares in the blessings, joy, and glory of all the others.

This communion of saints is the greatest help and benefit they can give. A person cannot ask for more from the saints than to share in their merits and rejoice with them. In return, every good thing a person does brings joy, honor, and help to all the saints in heaven. The best way to honor them is by making everything a tribute to their joy and by becoming a part of their holy communion.

CHAPTER FIFTY ONE

True communion with saints requires holiness, love, and obedience to God

This idea of communion in holy works is reflected in the words of Jesus, who said: "Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes and see that the fields are already white for harvest. The one who reaps receives wages and gathers grain for eternal life, so that both the one who sows and the one who reaps may rejoice together. For this saying is true: one sows, and another reaps."¹ Here, Jesus clearly makes a distinction between different workers: one sows, another reaps, and another gathers into the barn. But in the end, they all sit at the same table. The same applies to spiritual work and the rewards of the saints—every good deed done for God brings joy to all the saints. As Jesus said, they rejoice together.

However, it is important to fully understand what is meant by the communion of saints. This unity is happening now and will continue forever. But those who are not holy themselves will be excluded from all the blessings that the saints have and will have. That is why anyone who wants to share in the communion of saints in heaven must be a saint themselves. A saint is anyone who is free from mortal sin. And a person can only remain free from mortal sin if they truly believe in the Son of God, follow all of Christ's commandments, love their neighbor as themselves, and even love their enemies, as Jesus commanded.

¹ John 4: 35-37.

A saint must be guided by the commandments and faith. Anyone who breaks God's commandments is not holy and cannot share in God or in the communion of saints, either here on earth or in heaven. They cannot honor God or the saints.² For by having mortal sin, they dishonor God and blaspheme Him, and they dishonor all the saints and blaspheme them as well. Even if they build churches or altars for the saints, fast, pray, light candles for them, make offerings, ring bells, or burn lights—such acts are as if they were spitting in the saints' faces. Because, if someone breaks God's commandments, they are cursed with all their actions. So how can the cursed honor the blessed? They have nothing for the saints to receive. Therefore, they cannot honor the saints unless, being holy themselves, they honor them with their own lives, offering their holy lives in communion with the saints, following their examples, and using their writings to learn about the holy life. This is the great help of the saints—examples of holy lives and writings for learning the true life for those who see this as help from them.

Thus, the world cannot have communion with the saints, but, being one with the devils in spirit, it now shares in wickedness with them and will share in their punishment later. Therefore, the saints share all that is good in their holy communion. They have true brotherhood in Christ because, by keeping Christ's commandments, they are sons of God and brothers to each other in spiritual birth from God through faith and love. Together, they have all the spiritual things prepared for the sons of God. They also have Christ, their brother, who, after rising from the dead, said: "Go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"³

Thus, the communion between the saints is closer because they share sonship with God, brotherhood with Christ, and spiritual birth with each other.⁴ Therefore, their things are shared, as they belong to each other, so that they may be of benefit and joy to one another for all eternity.

Now, in this sense, we must understand the words of the Holy Spirit: in this spiritual body, each member is joined to the other through love. Just as the soul of a person connects all the living members of the human body, which are not dead, so similarly, the living members of the spiritual body, made alive by God's grace through the Holy Spirit, can be joined to one another in grace. And they are united with the head, Christ, and receive spiritual power from Him. In this spiritual unity and participation, they remain, so that each one may give to the other from what they have received from God,

² In the margin of the 1521 edition is written: "By what means are the saints honoured by us".

³ John 20:17.

⁴ That is, relatives.

and one contributes, so that they may share in the participation of others. This should not be understood as if someone were to give a material alms to a neighbor, and thereby believe they could do the same for everyone in the world. Rather, it is as if they were healing a sick hand, which would benefit the whole body and all its members. Therefore, what happens in this spiritual body is said to be the work of the Holy Spirit.

People cannot understand this in a material way, but they think of the holy Church in material terms, as the Antichrist's priesthood claims, saying that the material connection of the pope with the cardinals and other prelates constitutes the holy Church. Or alternatively, they claim that priests are the eyes, lords the hands, and peasants the feet; then, the order of that body, so that some fight, others pray, and the third work, while the gluttonous ones from the second group ride upon the peasants, making pleasure from their sweat and pain. This is how the Antichrist interprets the holy Church. But this is far from the truth of the holy Church, the bride of Christ, which is the assembly of God's elect, and according to another tradition, we say: the spiritual body of Christ, which is governed by the Holy Spirit and is bound together from many members.

Therefore, for the fellowship of the saints, of which we began speaking, although it is little understood by people, it is most necessary to keep the commandments of God, so that one remains in love for God and maintains proper love for one's neighbors; then, the participation of the saints will always flow to them and from them to all saints through the work of the Holy Spirit for the benefit of all believers, to the praise and joy of the saints in heaven. But sinners of this world have no part in these things; they are the body of the Antichrist and possess the spirit of the devil within them. They are participants in each other's iniquities, so that the iniquity of all sinners, as many as there are in the whole world, may come upon them, and then the punishment will come upon them all in their damnation. And thus, the assembly of the Antichrists will be the most cursed on the day of their damnation.⁵

⁵ The 1521 edition adds the following conclusion: "The book called *Net of Faith* comes to an end through the diligent effort of Chval Dubánek on the Thursday before the joyful feast of All Saints in the year of the birth of the Son of God, 1521, at the Vilémov Monastery."

